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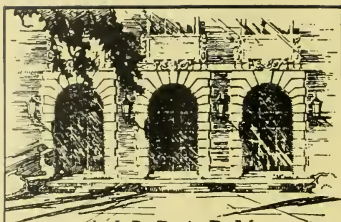
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DULCIBEL

VOL. III.

D U L C I B E L

BY

GERTRUDE M. HAYWARD

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"
Rabbi Ben Ezra—R. BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1890.

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DULCIBEL.

CHAPTER I.

HER MOTHER'S GRAVE.

Mothers have God's license to be missed.

Aurora Leigh.

THERE was a low mutter outside of distant thunder, as Dulcie lifted up her tearful face and met Arthur's calm, sorrowful one.

'You have been so noble and patient with me. It is you that must forgive,' she

said, with a faint searching after a smile in her sad face, and holding out her hand.

‘Forgive you, dear?’ clasping the proffered hand; ‘why should I forgive what has been all pleasure, all goodness? I have kept my secret foolishly, and been blind. You must forget it, and be my girl-friend still, Dulcie. God bless you, dearest! God bless you! I ought to have known——’

She stood up, and their eyes met; she allowed him, for one minute, to hold in his own both her hands; then the thunder rolled again, nearer this time, and came as an interruption to what was too unutterably painful for words.

‘There is a heavy storm coming. Have you a cloak or anything to go home in?’

‘I shall run through the churchyard very

quickly without any. It is such a little way.'

He held the hand she had first given him still, as they passed through the hall to the door; to loose it seemed like relinquishing the last sensation of his vanished hope, and she had offered it to him herself, this cold little hand. But at last it was unclasped, his lips just touching it, then all was over, and Dulcie had gone.

He stood watching the white figure, standing out against the vivid greens, and angry grey shadows of the approaching thunderstorm, as she disappeared among the trees.

'She will be safe home before the storm comes. It was better not to go with her.'

The effort at self-mastery, that had been upon him, was too severe not to crave now for a time of relaxation. He came back into

his study and closed the door. Then he took down the picture of 'Hope' from the easel, and turned it, face downwards, into the oak chest by the window, locking the old press down afterwards with a fierce snap, as though another Ginevra had disappeared from life, never to come out again but as the corpse of a dead ambition. Then he threw himself into the chair Dulcie had just risen from, and, drawing it towards the table, he buried his face in his arms.

'It was too sudden! How was she to know? I have never prepared her for it! My God, I have been a fool, and I have lost her through it!'

The thunder broke without in crashing peals, and blue lightning flashed its brightness into the room that had grown dark, and over the bowed head upon the

table. Arthur Scudamore, in after days, never had any recollection of the great storm that broke over Basildene that evening. A fiercer tumult within kept him oblivious, just then, to any raging of the outward elements.

Dulcie, too, had put a supreme effort upon herself to be calm in his presence when they parted, for his gentle consideration for her had unmanned her more than the passionate declaration of his love. She had not been able to control her voice to speak at parting, and her 'good-bye,' sounded more like a sob, than any distinct utterance.

Now, alone at last, as she crossed the lawn towards the churchyard, the long suppressed tears came like a welcome relief to her eyes. Dulcie had a horror of being seen crying, it was a relic of the childish

days when Francis had teased her for her weakness, and now a fit of weeping was so rare a thing with her, that, at once, she felt it would have to be accounted for to Miss Mellor. Miss Mellor, too, was so timid in a thunderstorm, there was no escaping from her, and then an explanation of the red eyes would need to be forthcoming.

With a craving to be left alone now, Dulcie turned to the church porch; she would go inside, if the door were open, if not, no one would see her in the porch, and there she might watch the storm, and be in peace.

The door was locked, and she sat down in a sheltered corner of the deep, shady old porch. Outside, in a minute or two, the rain, beginning by great drops, came down in a torrent, that set little streams a-running wherever an impromptu channel

could be found, while the crash of thunder and the blinding glare of lightning came to overpower the noise of splashing rain.

Dulcie hardly noticed them. It all seemed to harmonise with the trouble of her mind. She leaned her head against a little quaintly carved angel in the masonry, and covered her face with her hands in an attitude that was characteristic. At first only a confused sense of intense trouble and self-accusation came, she hardly comprehended what it was that so distressed her, as she sobbed in bitter bursts of unhappiness, like a passionate child. But gradually the tears ceased, and then, still pressing her hot forehead against the stone-work, the trouble outlined itself into a definite form. Was it true? Had she deceived Arthur Scudamore years ago? She had not known, then, what it was that

she had done. All the same, she had raised hopes in him, and had given to him a conditional promise. She saw it all too clearly now: that evening in the garden, long ago, on the day Chris had first come to them.

Had she meant to give any promise in those days? Memory recalled her childish hero-worship of Scudamore, and told her, that it had not been a promise, because she had not dared, then, to entertain so great a hope. Scudamore had been an ideal character, too clever, and too strangely above her, for her even to dream, at that time, of ever deserving his love.

Sometimes she had felt a little ashamed of her earnestness that evening, but it was only during the last year or so that she had lost the glow of pleasurable re-

membrance which the thoughts of their talk on that far-off day recalled. And now, she sobbed again at the recollection of how he must have lived in the memory which she had allowed to grow dim, of how he must have worked to fulfil the ideal that had changed in her. He had remembered all, and had been faithful, interpreting her words beyond their remotest meaning, and now that he had become, what she, in her simplicity, had told him to aspire to, he had asked her for the reward, and had found that it was vanity she had talked from, and that she had thoughtlessly deceived him.

Dulcie crossed her feet together, and pressed them down upon each other, as she clasped her hands over the chipped head of the flat-faced angel. Acute bodily pain just then would have come

as a relief to her over-strung, sensitive imagination.

Time passed rapidly as she sat thus in her repentance and distress, trying to reason with herself, and recall events to a mind only half-disposed to accept the arguments her own honest convictions raised. It is often so with any sudden awakening. We have been travelling insensibly, on our life-journey, along a route of change, with our eyes closed, and our senses only alive to the smoothness of our progress, till, by-and-by, on opening our eyes, it is hard to realise all the difference that has come over our surroundings.

Dulcie, till now, had not, for years, inquired into her feelings for Arthur Scudamore. She had accepted his friendship, and taken for granted that it was meant for nothing more *than* friendship, since the

summer evening, four years before, when the regard, that then was with him the simple affection of an older mind for a favourite and clever pupil, had contained, on her side, at least, the germs of a deeper feeling. Those germs had been scattered, and had perished. Not sufficient of them, even, had survived to interpret for her some warning of the altered nature of his esteem. He had kept his feelings carefully enough concealed to deceive others, he had deceived her too, it seemed, since the responsive voice of heart answering to heart had become so silent in her. She could not force the old feelings to return. She had awakened now, and found them dead.

But need this discovery have come as the painful revelation that it had to her, for all its attendant self-reproach, had there been no other cause for her distress?

Changed feelings and repentant sorrow in themselves might not have been found sufficient to warrant such unrestrained grief, had no deeper motive, no further awakening, not been, with them, inevitable.

Meanwhile, the thunderstorm had passed, and above the church the deep, serene vault of heaven glowed emerald and gold in the twilight, with here and there the throbbing of a coming star. Over the village, the black thunder-clouds were disappearing towards the horizon, and blue curls of smoke rose up straight from dripping cottage roofs. There was an intense calm all around the lonely girl, a calm that made itself felt.

Presently Dulcie raised her head, and watched the rain-drops shining in the evening light, and the glow that was

quickly deepening into darkness over the village. Then the tear-stained eyes turned away to another and nearer object. The inward tumult was far from spent yet, and, as she looked towards the green mound and white cross outside her father's window, the storm broke forth afresh.

‘O mother, mother! Why did you die? Why did you leave me with no one to help me in these things? No one to warn me, no one to tell me the danger! Why did God allow you to die? You would have seen all, and have known before what would come. And now—O mother, is there only another trouble for me to find, in understanding this?’

CHAPTER II.

WITH DULCIE IN THE GARDEN.

His, a brother's love that hung
With wings of brooding shelter o'er her peace.
Aylmer's Field.

MICHAEL came home to Basildene in the slightly irritable frame of mind that is not uncommon to people smarting under the wounds of a recent victory over self. His sister never remembered to have seen him look quite so pale and worried before, nor had she ever known him quite so impatient over the small things of life, that had

a very uncomfortable way of going wrong, under Miss Mellor's management, at the vicarage.

In his turn, Michael was too much absorbed in his own affairs, to remark either Dulcie's troubled looks or her departed cheerfulness. That the little sister was less pretty and companionable than usual was only an added one, among the many grievances poor Michael found so ready to hand, during the first week of that summer vacation.

It was on a piece with the disappearance of Warwick-Scudamore from Basildene, just at the time when his society was most needed there. But Michael had too much heroic thoroughness not to despise himself very quickly for the poorness of his spirit, and the depressed frame of mind that seemed to have taken possession lately of

Dulcie, stimulated him to some exertions on her behalf.

He had made his great sacrifice thinking of her. He would try to restore now that perfect confidence and mutual dependence that, once, had been so firm a link between them. He would tell her of all his plans for the future, and speak to her openly on certain other matters that had been much in his mind of late. But Dulcie had grown so quiet, and almost sad; Michael sought an opportunity in vain for nearly a week while she evaded him. Poor child! she tried to postpone the moment when she must give him an explanation of the troubled looks that, it was quite clear, had not been passed by unnoticed.

It was one evening that the opportunity made itself; a morning of intense heat and

sunshine, had been followed by an afternoon's downpour of rain—rain that had washed the geraniums and heliotropes to ruins, and had turned the calceolaria cups into little bursting reservoirs. Muddy little streams poured down the borders of the garden paths, and all nature hung its head in satiety.

Then, that evening the sun broke forth, with the voices of thrushes and of black-birds, rejoicing over the great rain that had brought such a feast of worms, (of late too rare a luxury,) and dripping shrubs and drenched, sodden blossoms once more lifted themselves up from the wreck.

There was a brilliancy and freshness of colouring in all nature, the drenched earth gave forth a fragrant smell, as the sunshine caught up the moisture from its surface, and the air in the vicarage garden

was heavy with the odour of mignonette and honey-suckle.

Into this world of moisture and fragrance, enclosed between four high kitchen-garden walls, stole Dulcibel presently, with cambric skirts held daintily high above her ankles. She had a tennis-cap of Michael's on, over the mass of bright hair, that the sunshine now caught at and burnished into gold, and had come out hastily into the garden, as the rain cleared off. The half sleeves and lace ruffles round her arms and throat, proclaimed that she was arrayed in the simple costume that passed for 'evening dress' at home, when no special guests' presence demanded a more careful toilette. She had evidently slipped out simply to get a little air, and enjoy the sunshine. First she picked a big bunch of mignonette, and tucked it in her belt,

and then, the tempting prospect of the strawberry-bed induced her to step in among its dripping leaves. Standing with her skirts held high in one hand, as with the other she discriminatingly picked out the fruit that the rain had left unsodden, Michael came upon her.

‘Blackbirds!’ said Michael, clapping his hands.

‘Oh, Michael! You should come and have some strawberries,’ she said, holding out two gigantic fruit towards him, with a very damp hand and wrist. ‘They never taste so good as just after rain, like this. They always remind me, then, of the sort of original taste strawberries had in the days of our childhood. Eating them off dessert-plates quite drives away the illusion.’

Dulcie was evidently loquacious. Michael, discreetly turning up his flannels, accepted

the challenge, and plunged in, too, among the glistening dampness.

‘Aren’t they dreadfully splashed and grubby?’ he asked, advancing warily.

‘Not if you take the top ones. Those that have kept up out of the dirt, and have only got the sweeter for the rain.’

“‘Survival of the fittest,’ evidently,” remarked Michael, reassured by the flavour of a handful with which his sister had presented him.—Those Basildene strawberries always seem to me like none that I taste elsewhere. They are that smooth and pale red kind, which have a flavour like pine-apple, and are very round, and luscious, and mellow; the old-fashioned fruit of a dear old-fashioned garden.

The glory of the summer evening, the new sweetness and beauty of refreshed nature, mingled with the rapturous notes of the

wood-pigeons and the clamour of the thrushes, acted as a sort of spell upon the brother and sister. It was like a scene given back to them from the past days of their childhood. It made them silent at first, though both knew that the other was under the influence of the same spell of recollection.

Presently Michael put his hand out and took Dulcie's arm.

'Come and walk round the garden, "little Sis;" at least, if you won't be chilly out here, in that thin gown.'

Dulcie put her hand into that of Michael, which was resting on her arm, and came silently.

'I want so much to talk to you, Dulcie,' he said, 'and the opportunity has never seemed to come lately. There is very much that I want to say.'

Still Dulcie did not speak; she only held his hand caressingly, and looked into his face.

‘Yes, I want to tell you that I am coming to Basildene, for good, after Advent, to do a curate’s work for father, for a time,’ Michael said, plunging into the news that came uppermost, without indulging in a preamble.

‘You coming here for that, Michael? After your fellowship, and what they think of you at Oxford?’

‘Yes, dear.’ How could he tell her all now, his heart failed him? ‘After that Sunday, father must never be allowed to do duty by himself, alone. He will never be the same man again. If he had another attack of the same kind, and were alone, Dulcie, I believe it would be his death. He is sensitive, and it is our duty to save

him all we can. Not by letting him resign, though. It would break his heart to leave the mother's grave, and all these associations. Nothing is to be done, but for me to come and undertake the work, and keep him from realising what it is we fear for him. He would never agree to work with a stranger, and no stranger could do what a child must.'

Michael said every word very quietly, as if it were all a matter-of-fact and everyday necessity, this sacrifice of himself for his father.

But his tone could not deceive Dulcie. She realised in a moment the struggle that must have been fought.

'You *are* good, Michael,' she said, twining her fingers round his with gentle pressure, and a silence followed between them. Presently, in a voice that assumed

indifference very imperfectly, Michael asked :

‘And Mabel West; she is not going to the hospital, after all?’

‘Oh, no. I think Mabel must be very good too. She has given up such a pet scheme in that. She is so dull at the Tower House, and poor Mrs. Scudamore very often is an awful trial. It is my gain to have Mabel here.’

‘You like Mabel?’ asked Dulcie’s brother. ‘I suppose she was obliged to make up her mind to stay, when Warwick went off so suddenly.’

‘No. It was settled before that,’ answered Dulcie, speaking in a low voice, that made Michael turn to look at her.

‘I can’t think what that fellow Warwick wanted to go off again for! It is perfect madness, his being in Rome at this time of

year. Instead of painting better, he'll take a fever or malaria, that will stick to him for life. Why, he wrote and told me, not long ago, that he meant to exhibit in some of the autumn galleries, and now, I suppose, he has gone without attempting to do so. My confidence in Mr. Warwick is getting rather over-burdened. I believe, now, he'll end his days as an unsatisfactory dabbler, for all his abilities.'

Dulcie was gazing away across the top of the garden-wall, a distressed look in her face, an expression that seemed a mute protest against every word Michael was saying; still she did not speak. Her brother interpreted her silence as indifference, and added, rather reproachfully:

'I used to think you and Warwick were such good friends, Dulcie—that——'

'Michael, I ought to have told you,' she

interrupted. It was intolerable to have Scudamore and her affairs discussed from this mistaken standpoint, the fatal truth must be told sooner or later. 'I ought to have told you. It isn't Arthur Scudamore's fault, this going away. Only it seemed as though I could never speak about it to anyone. He said something to me, Michael. He told me he—loved me, and was working for me. He will be a great painter. He wanted me to give him a hope, a promise. Something I could not do. It was so sad and hard for him, and he was so noble and patient. And now, it is because of me that he is gone away.'

Dulcie had drawn her hand away from her brother's arm, and was looking anxiously at him, awaiting the reproach that she felt must come. He hardly noticed the action, so astonished was he. There

was a ring of surprise, of reproach, too, if one was looking for it, in his voice, when he spoke.

‘Do you mean that Warwick-Scudamore asked you to marry him, and that you have refused him?’

‘Yes, Michael,’ she said, speaking in a low, firm voice.

‘I cannot understand. It always used to seem to me that you cared so much for Warwick; that you two had so much in common. Years ago, I mean; and, now that he deserves your respect more than he ever did, do you think less of him? How is it?’

Michael was vexed, and spoke as if he were; but, since the Rubicon was passed, Dulcie was prepared to be patient.

‘Michael, I never respected Mr. Scuda-

more as much as I do now. Perhaps, when I was a girl, he *was* my ideal hero, and I *was* in love with him like that. Those things change. I know him now, I know he is very noble, far too noble and good for me, and I respect him very much. But that can't make me love him. It is quite different, that; love comes, I don't know how. I was obliged to let him go away. It made me very sad. Oh, Michael, I *am* sad about it! But could I deceive him? I had nothing but respect and friendship for him. I didn't know how it was, until that night he spoke, and then I knew I couldn't, couldn't love him!

‘Of course no one can know but yourself, dear,’ said Michael, again drawing her hand within his. ‘You must do what you think is for your happiness, and no one must influence you. Still, I tell you truly,

little one, I am bitterly disappointed. I think you could have made Scudamore a good man, and perhaps a great one, if you had loved him, and could have given him your influence in his life. I won't say anything for yourself. If you could have let him, he would have made you happy, I am sure.'

'It has been very bitter, very hard, Michael. It has made me very miserable, but I could do nothing else. I could not deceive him, or myself.'

'Yet, I cannot understand,' said Michael. 'The ways of women, and of little sisters, in particular, are inscrutable. Dulcie child,' said Michael, presently, after they had been walking together in silence for a long time; whether his thoughts had been working in sequence, or were totally irrelevant he did not quite know himself.

‘Dulcie child, will you forgive your old brother, if he says something to you that has been in his mind very often lately? If he tells you something, and warns you, over anxiously perhaps, of a thing of which, after all, there may be no danger?’

Dulcie winked away the tears that had been gathering, and put her hand once more on Michael’s with a caress, the action implying the ‘speak on’ that the voice was not sufficiently under control to say.

‘It is about Chris Jocelyn,’ said Michael; and then paused.

‘Yes?’ inquired Dulcie.

‘We have seen so much of Chris lately, he has been like another brother with us, and, during his illness, you were so much together. I wanted to recall to you some things concerning him, that we are rather

apt to overlook, knowing him as well as we do. You know he will come of age soon, and then he comes into a very large property. He will have an income nearly as large as the whole of our little fortune. He will be sought after, and made much of, in the fashionable world, that is pleased to know very little of us Carwinions. You know, too, that our friendship with Chris was entirely of our own seeking. Father found out when he was at St. Aidans, and bothered his people in India until they let him come here, and he has been pressing with his invitations to him ever since. I'm glad he has, for our own sake, as well as for Chris's. It has made a difference to the poor chap, although he came to grief here, and had to give up the army. What I mean by this preamble is : don't let anyone ever imagine that we had an object in what

we have done for Chris. Well, it may seem impossible that anyone ever should ; but it is you, Dulcie, who must prevent the semblance of such a thing. We're proud of being Carwinions, but we're poor parsons' people, for all the Cornish blood we're so proud of, and we must be above the suspicion of anyone ; and now, this trouble with father makes another and graver motive, that I cannot even say to you. I'm not putting things clearly, child. I'm afraid of wounding your feelings. What I mean is, you must always be Chris's elder sister, Dulcie, and you must *never* let him make love to you.'

'Oh, Michael ! He never has !' she said, indignantly, her heart beating very fast.

'And he never must,' added Michael. 'Boys always fall in love with girls older than themselves, when they are Chris's

age, and they never make love quite so eagerly as then. Nineteen gives them license to say whatever they choose, and they will defy the world then. But, Dulcie dear, I have wanted to warn you beforehand. It would ruin Chris's life to listen to him. It would ruin your own. Chris has the world to see. He has only seen Basildene as yet. I may be hypersensitive, but those Kitsons might imagine we have been fostering this thing by our friendship for their son. It makes me morbidly anxious. An early engagement, especially with a girl older than himself, is the worst thing imaginable for a young fellow, with all the world before him. It is like stunting his growth. It would be positively pernicious for Chris. He is susceptible and keen about popularity. It isn't to be imagined that he knows his

own feelings yet. Besides, there is this fortune, and this other terrible reason, now. People will talk of Chris as a great "catch," by-and-by. Do you forgive my speaking so, dear? Chris has grown very fond of you, lately, I know. It is no imaginary danger.'

Dulcie walked by Michael, and listened, like one who hears a voice speaking in sleep. Her head was held up, and she was still looking away towards the sunset, with eyes from which all traces of tears had gone.

As her brother ceased speaking, she stopped suddenly, almost with a start, and turned to him. It was an involuntary action, like one awakening, and she recovered herself in an instant, and walked on.

'Michael, I knew all this. There was

no need of your speaking. I would not injure Chris's life so—I never would! I did not need a warning. Chris never should have made love to me. I think he never will want to. There is Janet West. You remember her? It is she whom he is in love with. That has always been a safeguard.'

'Janet West! Tush! That was over ages ago? Has he never told you? She is to marry Blackett. Poor Chris was sore over it at first. I thought you were in his confidence.'

'Janet West engaged? No, I did not know it.'

'And this other thing, Dulcie. I know I can depend on you. You will be careful, and remember the danger to him, when you are tempted to be too good friends with Chris?'

‘You dear good old Michael, I give you my word on it! Chris and I will never develop into lovers. There, that is a promise,—shake hands upon it!’

‘Well, it’s a one-sided agreement, but I believe my little sister’s word, and know she will do her duty.’

He took the hands proffered in confirmation of the promise.

‘Why, Dulcie, how cold you are! I have been mad to keep you out in the damp, in that flimsy frock. Come in now, we have discussed matters enough for one night. I hope you haven’t taken a cold into the bargain.’

‘Oh, I will go in, and get Sarah to let me have a warm at the kitchen-fire,’ Dulcie said, rather wearily, rubbing the chilly members together as they returned to the house.

But, when Michael left her at the kitchen-door, and turned away to go in to the study, his sister fled, not to the kitchen-fire for warmth, but to the sanctuary of her own room.

CHAPTER III.

TWO'S COMPANY.

As I looked upon her tranquil face, I saw that eye and lip and every shifting lineament were made for love, unconscious of their sweet office as yet, and meeting the cold aspect of duty with the natural graces which were meant for the reward of nothing less than the Great Passion.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

WHATEVER were Dulcie's feelings after that conversation with Michael, she kept them to herself, nor allowed anything to interfere, in future, with her desire to render her brother's short visit to Basildene as pleasant as she could. A shadowy resemblance to her old cheerfulness came

back, now that her mind was relieved by confession.

It is only a person occupied with the study of character who notices well-concealed listlessness, and the dark rings around the eyes which betoken sleepless nights; a brother, with affairs of his own, might be excused from such details of close scrutiny. Michael's belief was, that confiding her secret had cured Dulcie of her melancholy. Meanwhile, his own thoughts were particularly engrossing. His sister had discovered a great means whereby she might please him. Miss Mabel West played tennis well. Michael liked her to be invited to the vicarage, and was well-contented, and often enough put on his metal, to guard a single court against the play of the girls; and, when the setts were ended, Mabel and he dropped into a way

of insensibly gravitating together for conversation, while Dulcie, unobserved, slipped away to bend over the flower-borders for weeds, or to superintend the arrival of the little table with tea. The others sometimes realised, quite with a start, that she had left them, or forgot her oftener altogether, until she came back to call them.

‘I wonder if you were curious to hear whether I had gone to Guy’s Hospital?’ Mabel asked, almost the first time she met Michael. ‘I forget if you said whether you would be, or not.’

Michael stroked his moustache, then.

‘I forget too,’ he said. ‘No, I was not at all curious.’

At which answer, his companion was duly mystified. A very evident smile was in his eyes when he answered her, though he was hiding his mouth still, by that pro-

voking way of his, of pulling his moustache, so that she could not tell at all if he were laughing at her.

‘That is unkind. It doesn’t seem as if you took any interest in the effect of your little lecture, after all. I daresay you have forgotten it.’

‘No, I haven’t. Perhaps my want of curiosity shows something else. Not that I had much faith in my lecture, but that I had a good deal of confidence in you.’

‘I don’t know quite what you mean by that. I didn’t think you were given to paying stupid compliments,’ said Mabel, looking distressed.

‘Really, you were right, then. I am the most uncomplimentary, plain-spoken man that I know. I just say what I mean, though it appears I have no faculty for making my meaning clear. I never felt

curious about my "lecture," as you call it, because I knew quite well, and I told you beforehand, that you would do what was right. Am I making myself clear now? That was the confidence I had in you!

Mabel had never been able to conquer an unhappy weakness of blushing. She blushed now, till the tips of her ears, even, grew rosy pink. Michael thought the colour made her look very pretty, but he still stroked his moustache and kept back his smile. The artlessness of this young woman pleased him better than other people's cleverness.

'I cannot think how you guessed it, because I haven't even convinced myself yet, that I know what is right. I am not sure, after all, that it is not want of energy that has made me stay with aunt.'

'You see, then, I was right to put very

little faith in my lecturing. Apparently I did not convince you, though myself I knew what you would do.'

In view of the near future, Michael began to take a lively interest in parish matters, many of which Miss West administered. Dulcie considered his solicitude for the failing funds of the clothing club and his interest in the price of school-treat cake quite premature, but apprehended that the cause was not far to seek. She did not realise, yet, that her brother's falling in love might make a difference to her, for Mabel had won a very warm place in Dulcie's impulsive heart, already. And Mabel was so simple a little brown maiden, with such smooth hair and plainly made gowns, yet with a way of looking so pretty in her meek attire, when she blushed and pleaded ignorance, as she

would many times in the course of a conversation, laying bare her shortcomings with quaint truthfulness, that Michael came to regard these ways as the most fascinating of manners in a woman, and to look forward to life at Basildene as a not altogether unmixed prospect of dulness, if such help in the parish, and such society, still remained available.

The three weeks' vacation, all that young Carwinion could allow himself, with his near prospect of ordination, passed almost too fast. A hasty journey into Cornwall, to see his father, was to end his holiday.

The night before his departure, the three had been playing their often contested sett for a last time. There had been a small tennis-party at the vicarage, and, after their guests left, Michael proposed

that a final game should decide the superiority. They played till the glow from the sunset had almost faded into moonlight, and then, as Mabel gathered up her possessions for departing, Michael asked leave to walk with her through the churchyard to the Tower House. Dulcie had gone into the house, and the two were alone together.

‘Well, it will be winter, and I shall be in the garb of your parish priest, in all probability, when I see you next, Miss West.’ Michael took possession of her shoes and racquet as he spoke.

‘I am glad we won that last sett, then,’ Miss Mabel remarked, quite simply.

‘Why? Would you imply that you won’t have the courage to beat me at tennis, under the new conditions?’

‘Oh, dear, no! I think it is great fun

to beat curates at tennis. They hate it. Mr. Trott wouldn't play again this afternoon, when Dulcie won the single.'

'I hope I shan't develop into a Mr. Trott, though I shall be a curate. The species certainly lacks backbone, if Trott is a typical specimen.'

'Poor Mr. Trott! He is a bad specimen, isn't he? I wonder why people like that always drift into the Church? I don't think you could make yourself look like him. But I can't help wondering sometimes, all the same, why it is you want to be a country curate, at all. You have such a splendid work at Oxford.'

Mabel's speech was, like herself, guileless, yet it startled young Carwinion none the less.

'I wonder what reason you think I can have for taking up a life like it?' he said, speaking emphatically.

‘Perhaps I had no business to say that,’ she answered, penitently. ‘I made the remark without thinking. It was the comparison with Mr. Trott. Of course you have good reasons for coming here, though *I* cannot see why there should not be better ones to keep you at Oxford. But I make bad mistakes about such things. I nearly made a fatal one by wanting to go to the hospital.’

‘This is no matter for my own free choice,’ spoke Michael, seriously tempted to relate to her all the circumstances of his decision. ‘Though I volunteered to come to Basildene, and resigned my tutorship in consequence, my inclination, believe me, is for the Oxford life still.’

Mabel’s quick sympathy understood more than her companion’s words revealed.

‘I think I understand,’ she said.

Michael looked up suddenly, with a shadowy smile in his face. His companion's tone had implied sympathy, and, as her eyes met his, they had a gentle, tender little smile that came like veritable balm to him.

The thought that those whose opinions we most value understand us, at a time when the chance is that the world misinterprets, comes with a sense of relief and rest to one's most sensitive feelings. Mabel did not think now that he was coming in an objectless way to Basildene, to waste his life in voluntary stagnation; her quick perception had already banished that mistaken notion. The thought helped him to answer, quite cheerfully,

‘There is a similarity of pattern in the design of all our lives, when we look into them. We all have these small sacrifices

to make at one time or another, and we must put up with them, don't you think? with the best grace that we can muster. If we keep the thought that they are sacrifices out of the way, we sha'n't let our vanity interfere with our getting good still out of the new conditions. Haven't you found this in your own case?' he asked.

'Some people's are not little sacrifices,' was all that Mabel could reply.

She was beginning to see that her companion was doing a very noble thing in this coming to Basildene as a curate, and the magnitude of the conviction choked off the well-turned sentence she wanted to say.

'If you have guessed my secret, I know you will keep it?' asked Michael.

'Oh, I couldn't tell anyone! I am not clever enough to understand all about it,

but I know you are doing something which is very good, Mr. Carwinion, and you make me feel ashamed that I ever made such trouble of my own little sacrifice.'

'Perhaps your sacrifice helped another.'

They were at the gate leading into the garden of the Tower House. History was repeating itself. Michael opened the latch and held his hand out to her. Speech had come very haltingly with him during the last minute or two, for he felt he was sorry now that the time had come for a 'good-bye.'

'You must not imagine that I have done anything in the least heroic,' he said, with a little laugh. '"There is a fate that shapes our end," and perhaps, after all, I may have cause to call it a very lucky and good fate, that has brought about this for me. I hope I may.'

He looked very straight into her eyes, as he said 'good-bye,' and Mabel wished devoutly, then, that she could have learned to conquer the weakness of her blushes, although it was twilight, and Mr. Carwinion might not see them. Why did her heart, too, leap up to interpret his words in accordance with its own awakening desires ?'

So foolish a heart it was, that sent the blushes to her cheeks, and Michael saw them there, for all her wishing, and long afterwards remembered how they glowed, and made the little face look bright and pretty, as he lifted his cap and turned away.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. PURCELL EXPRESSES AN OPINION.

The tiny trumpeting gnat can break our dream,
 When sweetest ; and the vermin voices here
 May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting.

Lancelot and Elaine.

‘I don’t say but what father and I was
 took by surprise, Miss Carwinion ; for
 Belinda’s always held her head so high,
 since she came from boarding-school ; she
 might ha’ had a professional man for a
 husband, one ’ud ha’ thought,’ said Mrs.
 Purcell, in a high-pitched voice, and in an
 accent in which just sufficient suppressed

dissatisfaction was implied, to indicate that the present was not altogether an occasion of unreserved congratulation. 'Yes, I was took by surprise! I'd always believed Belinda was making fun of him. Not but what Dick Thorley's a nice young fellow, and fond of her a long time, I've seen that; and he'll be put into the farm at Milcot, when the old gentleman retires in a year or two. Monied people they are, Miss Carwinion, they work thirty horses on the farm, and keep their own shooting.'

Good Mrs. Purcell, for one moment pride for her family, and anxiety to keep a little wound secreted got the better of her, and made her boastful. Yet the occasion was an exceptional one, and disappointments, after all, when looked at favourably, generally contain a thing or

two to recommend them, which is as well to mention.

Now that Miss Carwinion had called with congratulations on Belinda's recently announced engagement, Mrs. Purcell was not going to be weak enough to admit that her maternal hopes with regard to that young lady's genteel prospects had not quite been fulfilled. Dr. Moore's assistant had found Miss Belinda an interesting patient, whose sore throat required a great deal of attention in the spring ; but, for all that young man's being a professional gentleman, and certainly an admirer of her daughter's at one time, Mrs. Purcell reflected that his monetary prospects and rights of shooting were probably limited in comparison to Dick Thorley's, though 'father could ha' made up for that, himself, if things had been different.'

‘Still we’re very pleased. But la! Miss Carwinion,’ added Mrs. Purcell, lowering her voice, as she edged her chair confidentially a little nearer to Dulcie, ‘la! talking of engagements, if I’d been asked, three months ago, to guess whose ’ud be the first we’d hear of, I shouldn’t ha’ mentioned Belinda’s.’

Oh, Mrs. Purcell! Mrs. Purcell! is this quite true, when young Stevens, exactly three months ago, was in daily attendance at the Manor House, with his nitrate of silver and his gargles? But these things are details, when news is to be procured by innuendoes.

‘There was Dick, here, talking about the same thing last night, saying he wasn’t sure yet who’d be wanting the church first. “Not the squire, Dick,” I said, “the squire don’t do for Miss Carwinion.” You’ll ex-

cuse our talking about you so, since we've known you all your life, and it's other folks talks quite the same as ourselves. Squire's too quiet and strange looking for you, Miss Carwinion, I've always said it; not but what he has improved since the days he came from college, with his long hair, and went about in velvet coats no better than a keeper. That was a trial for the poor old gentleman. He's a good man, and a kind-hearted one, is Mr. Scudamore, I've said it to James, times, notwithstanding his odd ways, and our not knowing much of him. Look at Solomon Brown, at the Clay, now, he can't speak high enough of him, and justly, too, but perhaps you've heard it. Solomon's always behind with his rent, and never sent squire the cheque for last Lady Day, till near the middle of June, and then puts in a letter with it,

telling all about his losses in the lambing, instead of an apology for being so behind. And, would you believe it, the day before squire goes away, comes a kind letter, and the cheque sent back, making it out almost as if it was a favour for Brown to take it. Solomon showed it me himself, with the the tears in his eyes; he says it'll set him up now the hay's so good, and the weather dry for the wheat. Not that it's exactly just, such ways, on the other tenants, I say, for Solomon's a thriftless farmer, and 'll never make two ends meet. But it speaks for itself o' the squire, though he is so short-mannered and queer. But there, Miss Carwinion, I never thought he was the style for you!

‘Oh, Mrs. Purcell! please, do not talk of it, do not listen to such rubbish! Mr. Scudamore is nothing to me, never will be, it is

the veritablest gossip !' said Dulcie, rising to terminate the visit, which was ending in such uncomfortable talk. She had prolonged it so far, from sheer inability to stem the flood of the elder lady's loquacity, as well as from a lurking desire to hear the story of Arthur Scudamore's good deed. 'There is no thought of my marrying Mr. Scudamore ! Why should people gossip about anything so untrue ? Please, Mrs. Purcell, contradict everyone who mentions it.'

'My dear Miss Carwinion, I have done so,' was the emphatic rejoinder ; and Mrs. Purcell held Dulcie's hand, lingeringly, before she opened the drawing-room door.

The gossip and the conversation were by no means exhausted yet, but there are some people who keep the tit-bit of their

intelligence for the moment when their friend is standing up to go. Mrs. Purcell was one of them. She and Dulcie took a step forward together to the door, their hands joined for the parting shake.

‘I knew how annoying it would be for your papa, such talking. I always said, “Mark me, there’s no truth at all in it.” Now, there’s that poor young Mr. Jocelyn. It made my heart ache to meet him on his crutch the other day, just before he went away to the sea. If I were a girl, I should be in love with him myself. Such blue eyes, and a laugh, I never heard a heartier, and he would stop, and chaff, and talk nonsense with an old woman like me, as if I were a girl. Poor young fellow! There, I tell you the truth, I’ve heard many folks say, if anyone’s to be congratulated, it’s

you and him, for all he may be a year or two younger than you, Miss Carwinion, and look such a boy——’

‘Mrs. Purcell!’ and Dulcie drew herself up angrily. ‘It’s too bad! it’s wicked to say such things. To repeat such gossip! I wonder that you can! If people are talking so, please, just tell them to ask me, and see the answer they will get!’

‘Dearie, dearie! I meant nothing. People will chaff and talk when they get together. I’m sorry I repeated it. Poor young Mr. Jocelyn! he’s a favourite with us all, and perhaps we’re too ready to listen to talk that’s so pleasant. Forgive an old woman’s chatter, Miss Carwinion.’

Dulcie softened and smiled as she shook hands once more. Perhaps there was good cause, after all, for these people to gossip, and good Mrs. Purcell was simply

curious, not malicious, in her repetition of what the village was saying,

‘Only tell everyone that there is no truth in any of it. “People will talk,” won’t they?’ she answered, trying to speak indifferently. ‘Give my congratulations to Belinda. Good-bye!’

That same day, Dulcie wrote two letters. She had thought of writing them very often previously, but determination to take the steps they involved had hitherto been lacking, until she came face to face with the position of things in Mrs. Purcell’s drawing-room. She had, it appeared, unwittingly been giving that enemy, gossip, cause to blaspheme tolerably freely of late. One letter of hers reached Oxford the next morning, and was read by Michael over his solitary breakfast coffee. It was short, and somewhat incoherent, when

compared to Dulcie's usual compositions, but the import of it was sufficiently clear : her brother was to persuade Jocelyn to remain in Wales till the commencement of the winter term, or at any rate to arrange, as an alternative, for his residence at Oxford.

‘It will be better for Chris not to come again to Basildene, just now; but you must explain things to him, Michael, and not allow him to be offended. I cannot tell you all my reasons for asking, but the foremost is, that the people here are talking, and saying things which Chris must never hear.’

Michael, as a good brother, read and understood, and acted upon the suggestions given in a manner that might be termed exemplary.

Dulcie's other envelope had a longer journey to travel; nearly a week after it was directed, Arthur Scudamore found it awaiting him at the Roman *poste restante*. He took it with a start of involuntary surprise, which astonished the Italian official, who still was puzzling over the singularity of the English name, and startled him into a smile. Arthur scarcely dared hope that he had recognised the writing, until he had opened his letter, and reassured himself by a sight of its contents. He sat down, and read it under the shade of the pretty cloistered piazza, where tourists, soldiers, and servants jostle one another in their eagerness for letters. Arthur heard the plash of the little fountain in the courtyard, and the drone of voices around him, as in a dream, while he

followed, line by line, the big, black, girlish hand-writing.

‘Dear Mr. Scudamore,’ wrote Dulcie. ‘There is a thing which I so much wish to ask you, that I hope it will be excuse enough for my breaking in upon your silence, by writing it to you. Mabel tells me you were to have exhibited this autumn in the Asprey Gallery. I have the catalogue, and there is no picture of yours named in it, while something tells me I am the cause. Will you believe, that I look forward to the day when your pictures will be valued and praised as they deserve? That day must, and ought soon, now, to come, and, if ever it can be hastened by your exhibiting the “Hope,” I want to ask now, that you will never allow any

thought of me to prevent it. I know that picture is very great and clever; and that it is my portrait will only make me value more, for you, the praise that it must win, although I never can forgive myself for the circumstances that led you to paint it.

‘ Believe me always to remain,

‘ Your sincere friend,

‘ DULCIBEL CARWINION.’

Those two letters represented the first accomplished steps in the upward struggle of right-doing on which our poor Dulcie had engaged. Short, and ineffectual, and perhaps unwise they were, and they went so small a way, after all, upon the new hard course she had entered with such steadfastness; yet intention is the criterion by which actions should be valued, and

against both these things, which she had asked for, her intensely human heart had secretly rebelled.

CHAPTER V.

AS BY FIRE.

O, constancy, be strong upon my side!

Set a huge mountain 'tween my heart and tongue!

Julius Cæsar.

THUS the summer, changing into autumn, brought about the accomplishment of those things at Basildene which we already have foreseen. Winter came to find the new order of things working smoothly, and Michael at home, in new orthodox clerical attire, with the village gossiping, when it saw him, about the probability of an engagement between him and Mrs. Scuda-

more's niece. Mr. Carwinion had returned, too, his reappearance proving a fruitful topic of conversation to the neighbourhood, much given to surmising, 'whether the poor old gentleman would prove any the worse, now, for his "stroke,"' and, 'How he'd get along with Mr. Michael, who'd got queer ways of his own, for a curate.'

Truth to tell, the vicar's return gave rise to much suspicious comment, owing to a morbid dread he had of again entering his church, and once more facing his congregation. For these surroundings seemed to bring back to him all the horror of his last appearance among them. This shrinking from publicly meeting his parishioners furnished some of them with the notion, more or less forcibly pronounced in Westernshire dialect: 'That, depend upon 't, there's summat uncommonly queer wi'

t' vicar.' But gradually, in the strength of his son's dependable companionship, the timidity and suspicion both died natural deaths, and John Carwinion's old pleasure in his Church's ritual, and the old dogmatic narrow views that needed no fresh effort nor originality in their support, reasserted themselves, and kept his mind in a way preoccupied. He returned with something like vigour, then, to the old routine.

It was not with unmixed feelings of pleasurable anticipation that Michael came from Oxford to take his share in looking after the spiritual well-being of Basildene. The cramping parochial routine that had been laid down nearly thirty years before, by his narrow, high-church father, had never since been altered or deviated from. It roused in Michael—who had very limited sympathy with Tractarianism, and despised,

right liberally, all hard and fast rules in religious life, as antiquities rather more old-fashioned than the pope—a perpetual disposition to kick against the pricks. His reforming notions came into collision with institutions every day of his new life.

Michael never forgot the experience of one of his first sermons at Basildene. He had been talking, with all the impressive eloquence of his earnest nature and his wide knowledge, upon the text, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you,' and it had been touchingly evident how at pains he had been to employ nothing but homely metaphor and simple language.

Yet, after the service, there was a terrible bathos, reminding him of the limited sympathy he was to find in the new surroundings, when one of the churchwardens stopped to question him.

‘Then, what sort o’ a heaven, Mr. Michael, d’ye think my little maid’s gone to, if that’s your notion o’ kingdom come? That new doctrine o’ yourn don’t suit us steady-going folk, sir. We don’t want such new inventions, nor to know nothin’ o’ the kingdom of heaven, ’cept about t’ angels, and t’ harps, and t’ singing, till we gets there, and sees for ourselves!’

Certainly it was chilling to know that the sympathy and earnestness, which had gained so many among his pupils to the cause of Truth in progressive Oxford, were powerless even to make themselves understood here. The thought was oppressive, that goodness and truth, to be effective in Basildene, must be old-fashioned, like the people, or else stand in danger of being taken for the ways of ill-disguised wolves, and being reprobated according to ancient

prejudice concerning the assumption of sheep's clothing.

But quiet patience and gentleness came naturally to Michael Carwinion, and every day he realised more fully the absolute necessity of his presence at Basildene. He spared no pains to make himself understood, even by the most ignorant of the Basildene rustics, who cared to allow himself to be interviewed by 'Master Michael,' and literally did the whole duty of parish minister; for Mr. Carwinion's capacity for work now proved to be no more than a farce, if we except a pronounced tendency to interference.

Dulcie, sometimes watching her brother's forbearance and cheerful self-sacrifice, would be touched to impulsive compunction over her own shortcomings,

and the selfishness of the troubles which neither time nor patience seemed to make any the lighter for her. For it would be nonsense to deny it—her very face revealed the fact—Dulcie had been haunted by the oppression of a very great trouble lately. Through the shortening days of late summer, and the long autumn evenings, the cloud that had gathered over her cheerfulness never lifted.

Dulcie was the same, and yet not the same; for no effort of will could give back to her quite what this year was taking from her. Is the secret trouble hard to guess? Long before Michael spoke to her that evening in the garden, Dulcie had known quite well, and fact for fact, the things which he then told her.

‘Chris must never make love to you;’

and the promise that he never should had been mentally registered months previous to that night.

But these resolutions had been passing thoughts which disturbed her little, and the future had seemed well enough able to take care of itself, until Michael spoke words of warning, and Mrs. Purcell, supplementing him, had told her what gossip was saying. Then the trouble, which had first shadowed itself in a possible form on the evening of Arthur Scudamore's proposal, became a reality and a terrible renunciation; and things which before had been mere simple pleasures, Dulcie now learned bitterly, must have an end. The cherished freedom of an intercourse which had been one of the best privileges of her quiet life, must, from henceforth, cease.

It was not only a possible danger for Chris she had to guard against. The thought that she must sternly deny herself the sight of those dear blue eyes, or must learn to meet them indifferently; the idea that his laugh and his dependent trustfulness, all must be reserved and given to another, that she might never love him, or, as freely as of old, give him her friendship and take his; all these thoughts led to the discovery of what Chris really was to her. She had not known that

‘ Her love had wrought into her life
So far, that her doom was to love still,’

until she realised it, indeed, to be a ‘doom.’

Sometimes, in the lives of some few of us, there comes a time when it seems as if all the props and stays of our once easy-going existence have been taken from us suddenly. Troubles, proverbially, never

come alone. That was a year of utter loss to our poor Dulcie.

The terrible trouble about her father, and the sorrow and compunction which followed Scudamore's revelation of those illusive hopes of his, these, by themselves, would have been sufficient to crush the spirit, and all reliance on her own rectitude, out of her. And then followed the discovery that Michael's first and best love was being won by some one else; not that her brother loved her less, but it was hard to see him love another more. Poor girl! One after another the old props failed her, and in their place was left nothing but the difficult, nay, almost impossible duty of renunciation. The renunciation of the best and last thing that was left to her; the renunciation of all that seemed to make life dear.

‘I always intended to do it,’ she told herself. ‘I never thought of marrying Chris—God knows I did not! I, who am so much older than he is!’ but she had always thought of loving him, always thought of having the same perfect confidence with him that she was learning to be impossible between them now.

And it is well enough to make resolves, and say emphatically, ‘Duty demands it, and I never will again do so and so.’—‘I will abstain from even thinking of these things. They shall be banished, and, let come what may, I will act as if they were not!’

It requires an effort of will to be thus virtuous; an effort that is beyond everything commendable. But study of the physiology of memory reveals to us that there are workings of the brain organiza-

tion that free-will is powerless to control. The scent of an evening flower, a chance bar of music, a certain shadow, or a landmark on the highway will influence the waves of that thing called memory, and arouse the associations that our wills would fain forget. And in dreams, the brain-making capital, in its unaccountable freaks, of the things not even hinted at in daily life, will bring men into situations that, in waking thoughts, they scarcely have ventured to imagine to themselves.

The spirit-land knows no barriers of resolve; there is no past, no future with it; it fathoms not the realities of loss and death; it passes over and ignores the most virtuous intentions, and, with cruel persistency, marshals our dead in vital array once more before us, only to leave us wak-

ing again, too painfully conscious of our loss.

The alternate misery and ecstasy of those nightly dreams haunted poor Dulcie like actual experiences. In the day-time she might be brave, and make memory a blank by bodily occupation, filling her life with small parochial cares, and social duties.

‘I do wish father would pension off Miss Mellor. I think housekeeping worries would do me good,’ she said once, smiling faintly to Michael, who answered, moved by the plaintive white face :

‘Why, little woman, you look as if you had worries enough already. I cannot think what has come over you ;’ not guessing how he sent a random arrow home. But it was the potency of the returning

temptation, the renewed struggle of desire against resolve, in the long wakeful night-watches, that wore her spirit out. Phantoms then of the future, loneliness, inevitable misunderstanding, perhaps an end similar to her father's, these were the ghosts which haunted her, shadows grown long and gaunt in the weirdness of the night, and only to be succeeded, when sleep at last made its claim, by the ungovernable sensations of dreaming memory coming to warn her how possibly futile all her strongest resolutions might prove. And on this wise the time of Christmas drew near.

The suggestion that Chris Jocelyn should come for the vacation to Basildene had met with some opposition from both Dulcie and Michael. Her brother partly guessed Dulcie's motive, when she gave it

as her opinion, that Chris ought to make other friends, and not be dependent on them always, and had taken her part, when their father angrily repudiated the suggestion of 'turning a cold shoulder towards anyone whom I thought you professed to care for.'

Mr. Carwinion exhibited unusual tenacity upon the matter. It was a point which seemed to have much connection with the past that his feeble mind dwelt on so frequently. That his friend Lionel Jocelyn's son should be in need of a home when John Carwinion had one to offer him ! The bare idea of such a thing was an insult to the memory of a friendship. If Chris's friends were coming to England to make a home for him, that made present obligations none the less pressing, and Chris was to come to Basildene as often as he chose, until the

Kitsons or Major Bultitaft established a prior claim to his society, or John Carwinion was no longer a master in his own house.

Thus Chris, knowing nothing of the circumstances which prompted Mr. Carwinion's unusually warm invitation, nor the misgivings of the brother and sister, came once more as a guest to the vicarage. It was then that Dulcie's resolves first encountered the severity of a real test. For it was not until she saw Chris now, and this Chris no longer the school-boy, nor the invalid lad of six months ago, but the tall handsome youth, just changing into manhood, who had acquired the polish and grown-up air which develops quickly enough in the 'varsity fresher,' be he never so boyish when he goes up to his college; Chris, with a fair promise of a

moustache, and just sufficient of the invalid left to make him interesting—until she met him now, she had realised but a part of the truth concerning him.

It was a difficult position for her all that Christmas. She needed to watch and restrain every impulse in his presence, that no unguarded word or action might discover the ever-present thought. It was hard to have this handsome, blue-eyed Chris for ever eager to be her esquire, and to feel she must repulse sternly the thousand little tokens of affection which it once had been so natural to receive. Hardest still of all, was it, not to be too tender over him when the injured knee was troublesome, and he had, with pitiful attempts at patience, to come and rest on the drawing-room sofa. A woman is little worthy of her name, if she is not ready at

all times with sympathy for pain ; but poor Dulcie could only then be true to her woman's instinct at the expense of her most virtuous resolves. She would run away to ask Miss Mellor's advice, and come back with her sympathy and suggestions in the good housekeeper's society, much to the exasperation and wonderment of the sufferer.

The vacation had almost come to an end now, and Dulcie's heart, dreading the farewell, was beginning to beat freer at the thought of the relief that would come with Chris's absence. The fair young face was bent gravely over some crochet-work, and the thought was in her mind that these partings must go on henceforth, till the time—would it ever come?—when she could endure them without a pang, when misunderstanding should so have widened

the breach between them, that even she could forget what the past once had been. The firelight shone upon her gold-red hair, and daylight was waning, as the clock ticked round to four. Then the drawing-room door burst open suddenly, and Dulcie's heart gave a painful leap.

‘Ah, so here you are; I thought so! Alone at last! I saw Miss Mellor in her Sunday finery, and her card-case, and she looked good for an hour or two, so I took the hint, and came back. Michael's gone up to the Tower House, *as usual*.’

‘Did you think I minded being left alone, Chris? I thought you so particularly wanted to see Forest to-day.’

‘Oh, it's Forest's tea-time; he can wait. I wanted to talk to you much more particularly. Are you too busy to put up with me, now I have come,—eh?’

‘Of course I’m not. I can talk and crochet too. Besides, it’s almost too dark to work, and it’s a shame to have a lamp when there’s a sunset outside like that.’

‘So it is! Now’s the best time in the day. That’s why old Michael has prowled round to see Mademoiselle Mabel. Do you mind my lying on the rug, here, it’s jolly to keep up the good customs of old times? Do you remember, Dulcie, how we used to sit by this fire in the winter, when first we knew each other, and talk about everything under heaven?’

‘You hadn’t quite such a long six feet of humanity to stow away, then. Things aren’t quite the same now, Chris, though we have a way of forgetting it.’

‘No, I hadn’t a game knee at that time, but life isn’t much the worst for it. Heigh-

ho ! Dulcie, do put away that work. I hate to see a woman knitting or crocheting. It makes me nervous. I always think she must be a sort of Madame Defarge, and be knitting in knots against me for every slip I make, while her needles go in and out mysteriously, like the Fates !'

'Very well, then, only Nanny Weeks won't get her shawl so soon.'

'Bother Nanny Weeks ! Dulcie ?'

'Yes, Chris ?'

'Dulcie, I came in on purpose to ask you something.'

'Don't ask it, Chris. I'm not in an obliging frame of mind. Talk to me, tell me things, but don't ask me to do anything else, now I've given up the crochet.'

'You shall have the crochet back when I've asked it. Let me hold it here, now, in

pledge.' He held his hand out lazily for the work, his blue eyes looking up at Dulcie with a long steady gaze.

Dulcie trembled a little under its steadfastness, and her heart beat faster; she was not proof against the irresistible fascination of Chris's handsome face. Even now she felt that absolute safety would only be in flight, though the simple circumstances of the case made such an action impossible.

'Don't drop the stitches, Chris,' she said, leaning back into her chair, when she had given him the work, and looking into the fire.

Chris wound and unwound the ball of wool in silence for a minute or two.

'How happy old Michael seems. I suppose that *is* an engagement?'

'He does seem perfectly happy, doesn't he?' said Dulcie, breathing freer.

Chris did not respond. He smoothed the fur rug absently, and seemed uncertain what to remark next. Suddenly he raised himself on his elbow and looked again at his companion.

‘Dulcie, you’ve been so cool to me lately. Do you know why it is I came back now? I want you to give me a promise, before I go away. May I say something to you, ask you something, that has been in my mind all this term at Oxford? I meant to say it long ago,—only why is it that you have been so cool and distant?’

He came and knelt by her side, putting his hands over her own, and looking into her eyes. She was taken unawares.

‘Dulcie, you have been my truest friend, my more than sister, ever since the days when I was a small boy, and laid on the rug here, and told you all my St. Aidans’

troubles. I wanted to lie here now, just to bring back the old feeling, to look at you, and think you could not really change. Things have changed, though! I am different—you are. You're not my sister. That sham can't go on! You must be something else, now. Dulcie dear, let me say it, hear me. Will you give me this thing, you, who have never refused me? Will you tell me you love me enough to be one day more than a sister, tell me that you have changed only for this?' and he looked so hopefully, so confidently into her face, with the appealing tenderness of his beautiful eyes, as though he had no misgiving, but that next moment he might venture to raise his head, and pledge the confirmation of his desire by a kiss.

‘Chris! Chris!’ cried Dulcie, wresting away the hands he held, and giving a des-

pairing glance at the distance between herself and the door, that would have to be traversed, should she seek safety from the discovery of her emotion in retreat.

‘Chris, you must not ask it! Hush! Oh, please, do not say any more! It could not be! I could not promise, Chris. Oh, why do you ask?’

He seized her hands again, and held them, standing up now, and bending over her. He could feel the tremor that shook her, and saw how agitated she was. But how was a boy, like Chris Jocelyn, to understand the conflict of will and desire that was being fought then, or to know what strong deep current of intense love was flowing beneath this ruffled surface of resistance? He only felt perplexed, partly disappointed, but by no means baffled. Intuitively, from much knowledge

of Dulcie's nature, he guessed something of the truth, and, though this resistance was new to his experience, it only stimulated him to success the more.

‘Tell me why not! Dulcie, my darling Dulcie! Why may I not ask it? Oh, Dulcie, I would love you! I do love you so much, so very much! I would work, I would live just for this prospect, to make you happy. It would change all my life. The thought of it *has* changed my life! Everything I have done lately, I have done in the thought that it brought me a little nearer to you. Do not take it away. Why should you? Tell me why you should!’

‘I cannot tell you, Chris dear. Let me be your sister. Let me tell you, that I do love you, Chris boy, very very much, like this—as your sister.’

She smiled through the mist of tears, looking up at him so very tenderly, it seemed to her as if her heart must break with the supreme effort at calmness. Then she loosed her hand, and standing up, too, she put it on his shoulder appealingly.

For one moment poor Chris felt daunted, the gentleness of her resistance overcame his hope, and sent a sudden chill, a thought that this was the final answer, this tender pleading resistance that meant defeat. But passionate boyhood is sanguine, it will not recognise defeat, and Chris had known and understood Dulcie too long for this unexpected reversal to be accepted as ultimate. Her hand was still upon his shoulder, he stood in a tempting position, Chris threw his arm round her, and held her.

‘Tell me, Dulcie, *why* you won’t have me? Dulcie! Dulcie! No one could—

no one can love you as much as I do. I would die for you. I would be glad to, if you will not let me live for you. Is there some one else that you love better?’

She struggled a little, and stood free from him, a burning colour mounting in her cheeks. It had been a moment of intense joy, that illicit one, when she had been held against his heart, in his arms ; it overcame everything but the strong determination to do right, which was the strongest part of her love for him, and now the tears gathered fast, and her strength of resistance failed. She went towards the door. Poor Chris’s conscience smote him, and, though a mist, too, came before his eyes, and he felt ready to break down weakly himself, he made an effort to evince his penitence.

‘Forgive me, I lost control of myself.

Come back, Dulcie, one moment, to forgive me,' he pleaded, looking very distressed.

'Poor Chris, I forgive it all,' she said, returning, and putting her cold fingers through his hair and on his forehead, as he threw himself, the picture of despair and misery, into the wicker-chair she had vacated. 'Only forget it. Let me be your sister still.'

For just a second the temptation came to kiss the hot brow on which her hand rested, but the impulse ended in a lingering touch of the fingers, the touch 'as of hands that bless,' and then she stole away alone to the quiet of that room which so often had witnessed her trouble, to struggle on for the completion of the victory which had so nearly been a defeat.

Chris was lying back in the low chair, contemplating the drawing-room ceiling,

with his hands in his pockets, and a very forlorn face, when Michael, returning, found him half-an-hour after Dulcie had left him. The position had nothing phenomenal in it, for Chris was given to 'lolling,' he was even whistling below his breath, and the remark with which he greeted Michael's appearance was less than trivial. Michael never suspected anything to have occurred, even when Chris, leaving off his observation of the ceiling, came down to earth again with the remark :

'I think I shall go up to Oxford to-morrow, and get things straight there, before term begins on Monday ;' though he vouchsafed no further information concerning the nature of the 'things,' that required four days to get 'straight,' and Michael even deemed it necessary to protest, though without success,

against the suddenness of this resolution.

That night, when Chris was lighting her candle in the hall, and the others, except Michael, had all gone on to bed, Dulcie felt that she could bear the painful silence which had fallen between them no longer, and braved her brother's presence, and spoke. Michael was lighting his pipe over the fire, he might not hear, she could not help herself, could do no otherwise, if he did.

‘Just the same, Chris?’ she asked, holding out her hand. ‘Your sister still?’ and smiled at him, with a tremulous mouth.

‘*The same*, Dulcie! How can it be? I shall never love anyone else like I love you, but it is all disappointment and unhappiness now.’

He only held her hand for a moment, and then turned away, his face flushed and

angry, and an unreasonable feeling of indignation and despair in his heart. He went away to Oxford the next day. One relenting caress of her hand at parting was the only balm vouchsafed poor Dulcie for the unutterable pain this misunderstanding cost her, and Chris departed, considering himself exceedingly badly used.

CHAPTER VI.

SCUDAMORE'S SUCCESS.

Pas de pleurs, pas de plainte vaine ;
 Je sais respecter l'avenir.
 Vienne la voile qui t'emmène,
 En souriant je la verrai partir.

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

THE British public had allowed itself to become quite enthusiastic, and the art reviews and art journals were out-vieing each other in sounding the new painter's praises. A small weekly review, known previously to only a few literary hopefuls from the neighbourhood of Oakleigh Square,

had made the discovery, and that tide, which rises to a flood not oftener than once in the affairs of most men, had the good luck to bring this identical number of the little unknown review before the eyes of a great art critic. He read, and was struck by the fancy that there might be originality and genius in this work that the *Progress Review* criticised so ably, in words which might have been his own, and he took the trouble, (a great matter for a great art critic,) to go again to the Asprey Gallery, to look into the truth of things for himself. And now the British public was buying the little *Progress Review* with avidity, and was saying what a clever little periodical it was, and everyone, who knew anything of art, was asking his neighbour, if he had been yet to the Asprey, and had seen, in the spring collection there, the

famous painting by the new Roman artist. The *Times* was very gracious, and, in the second notice it gave of the collection in the Asprey Gallery, it had many flattering things to say concerning the style of the new painter, 'whose method recalled the force of a Rembrandt, combined with the colouring of a Murillo.'

The picture was called 'God's Sunshine and Shadow.' It was a scene in some provincial Roman town, Frascati or Albano, and was strangely realistic in its simplicity and pathos. A group of beggars,—not theatrical picturesque lazzaroni, but children of poverty and pain, such as Millet painted in Normandy—were gathered round a roadside calvary. These Italian beggars were not without some natural southern beauty and grace, despite their misery, as they stood together in the rich mellow light

of a summer's evening sun, under the shadow of the crucifix. The light fell obliquely on every figure, the rags and misery of each one in the group made clearer by its brilliancy, and it told of pain, and want, and squalor; but on the bowed head of a brown, wrinkled old woman, falling across the white folds of her head-dress, and on the rounded cheek and white-clad shoulders of a little tired child, lay the deep shadow from the Christ on the cross.

People were saying that this painter must be a poet, too, there was a pathos in his picture that went straight to the heart. A few men who came to see it, and who read the reviews, remembered the artist's name, 'A. Warwick-Scudamore.'

'Scudamore of King's! Ah, the man who used to paint heads at college, and who surprised everyone by coming out

among the wranglers of his year,' these said, and remembered, that some one of their acquaintance had met him in Rome not long ago, and said that he was looking altered, looking years older than he was, — 'but it was only natural, for Scudamore must have been working in an extraordinary way since he left [Cambridge, to do a thing like this!' 'He always was a strange fellow! It was just a thing he would do, turn out a celebrity, when everyone had forgotten him!'

Arthur heard of his suddenly acquired fame with quiet satisfaction. Once he had laboured for this success. He had counted the cost when he began work, and, now that the price had been paid to the utmost, the actual zest of success had disappeared, had died. But, in its place, he realised that he had found a life's work, something

which must take the place of that which he had lost. That letter from Dulcie had stimulated his efforts, just at the time when the bitterness of despair, which so often precedes the very moment of triumph, was deadening his energy. He had written to tell her that the 'Hope' could never be exhibited; the subject was too sacred with him for it to run the gauntlet of public criticism, but that he trusted, instead, to accomplish still something which might not altogether disappoint the confidence she had in him.

He had worked hopefully from that time, labouring through the summer and autumn, sketching during the hot weather among the mountains round Albano, and returning in the autumn to carry out the impressions he had gained, upon larger canvases in his Roman studio 'God's

Sunshine and Shadow ' had been a sudden inspiration. The group under the Calvary had attracted his attention one evening as he returned to his lodging, worn out with a day's wandering in the hills, and, tired as he was, in a short half-hour's enthusiastic work, he had sketched the outlines, and had arranged with the wondering lazzaroni to return and paint them at the same hour, upon the following day.

He worked with the consciousness of a genuine inspiration guiding his brush, and completed the small sketch in two or three evenings. Then he made separate studies of the more noticeable among their dark, wild-looking faces, and returned with the collection of sketches, to work up the great idea at his leisure at Madame Laurent's. When it was completed, he knew that his reputation rested on it.

‘Every stroke has been done by my heart, as much as by my hands,’ he wrote to his mother. ‘I know I cannot command success, but I shall never do anything more worth it.’

And the British public, after nearly overlooking a masterpiece, by a lucky chance found out the genius of this new artist, and elevated him to the highest pinnacle of its praise. The news of her son’s success re-animated an expiring hope of poor Mrs. Scudamore’s.

‘Perhaps Arthur will care to live in England, now they think so well of his paintings here,’ the lonely mother anticipated, regarding this as the greatest good likely to accrue to the recognition of her son’s ability.

Michael and Dulcie made the picture an excuse for a holiday, and together went to

London for the day, to visit the gallery in the Haymarket. They were standing side by side before Scudamore's picture, slim Dulcie in her dark-blue serge, and little velvet hat, and Michael, an unfamiliar figure in clerical attire—both their faces rapt in silent admiration,—when no less a person than the artist himself came into the room. The gallery was almost empty, and Arthur saw them immediately he entered, and came across to them. He was in travelling costume, and looked wayworn and weary.

‘*Saluté!*’ he said, ‘I have but just arrived. I have come straight from Rome, and am a-weary. This is a lucky fate! I was tempted to run in and see how they have hung me, before I went on to Basildene; although they say it’s a bad sign when one has a sneaking desire to come and look at

one's handiwork. Still, I hadn't seen this since it left the Via Mercede. And I am to run up against you two, by the generosity of chance. Do you like my picture, Miss Carwinion?' he asked, presently, looking from the painting to Dulcie, and then at it again.

She had been a little nervous, a little self-conscious with the first surprise of meeting him, as people unskilled in the *sang-froid* of society are apt to be on first encountering a friend whose presence recalls painful events to them. But Arthur's manner had reassumed the old natural way with her, quietly deferential and gentle, yet with such self-assurance in its very reserve as was oftenest associated in her recollection of him, and it set her at her ease at once.

She could scarcely realise that it was she

who had inspired this reserved, serious-faced man to paint a picture like this before which they stood, so little like was he to the latest thoughts with which the painting of Arthur Scudamore was associated.

‘I think it perfect. Perfectly lovely,’ she said, answering his inquiry in a low voice.

‘Not perfect! Far from that. I was ambitious for it, and I woke up one day to find myself famous, but no one knows the short-comings of this, as well as I do myself. If you could have seen that child’s angel face, and the sunlight, and clear atmosphere which was over everything—ah, you cannot know the real beauty of it! One cannot tell these things with just so much paint and canvas, try as you may.’

‘Oh, but indeed I think you have! This is truer than anything I ever saw. It seems to live, to tell us something—

a lesson. How we miss these things in life !'

'I am glad it is, as it is,' he said, smiling at her enthusiasm. 'At last it is something done, though I often enough lost heart in the doing it. Shall we walk about now, and look at the achievements of others? Where is this head by Fantin, which everyone is talking about?'

They strolled round the gallery for a while, Michael and Scudamore mostly monopolising the conversation, except when the pictures were the subject of their talk, when Dulcie found herself speaking in the old way, as a pupil to a master, and listening to Arthur's decided opinions with the old accustomed deference, till she almost forgot that there ever had been a moment in which the position between them was reversed.

She was very grateful to him for the delicate tact of his manner, though, after a time, his increased seriousness, and the care-worn look in the brave dark eyes, grew upon her with sad significance. He was changed, although she had not at first noticed it; he looked wearied and aged, and there were lines round his mouth which the long moustache did not entirely conceal.

‘I had a touch of fever in the autumn, and it hangs about me still, at times, though I assure you I never felt more fit in my life, since Asprey and the reviewers worked up this success for me,’ he said, in answer to Michael’s observations concerning his ill looks.

‘You can’t live on a reputation, man! You are coming down now, to get some fresh air, and to be looked after at Basil-

dene, I hope. Mrs. Scudamore thinks this success should satisfy you.'

'Well, it will for a fortnight. Poor mother, I must leave her after that, to finish a thing I have in hand for the Salon. Bubble reputation won't live long on this, and my work, now I find there is some good in it, is the best thing left to live for. Carwinion, that place at Basildene is a white elephant to me. I wish I could hand it over to some fellow like you. It's a weight on my mind. It's the greatest drawback in life, the thought that the tenantry down there perpetually consider themselves aggrieved.'

'The ways of artist-squires certainly are unintelligible to the general public,' remarked Michael, with a thin vein of sarcasm in his voice, which was not lost upon the other.

‘Am I to class you among that large order, Carwinion? Have my doings been quite unintelligible to you?’ asked Arthur; and his tone had the nearest approach to sadness in it that he had evinced.

Michael felt quick compunction.

‘Heaven help you, Scudamore!’ he said, in a low voice. ‘I wish it had been different.’

Dulcie had discovered her little favourite Italian boy, which was also hanging in the gallery, and they had strolled on, and left her looking at it, when this short conversation took place. The two men became silent after it, and Scudamore found he had to leave almost immediately, since he had telegraphed to announce his speedy return to Basildene, and would not wait to travel by a later train with the Carwinions.

‘There goes the best fellow I know,

growing old before his time,' said Michael, as the baize door swung softly back after Scudamore's retreating figure. 'Oh, Dulcie, Dulcie! If you would let me lend you my glasses, you might make a happy man of him yet!'

'Never, Michael,' said the little sister, drawing her hand within the black coat-sleeve. 'You will not talk of it to me, dear, for that can never be.'

CHAPTER VII.

BAD NEWS.

And constancy lives in realms above ;
And life is thorny ; and youth is vain ;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.
Christabel.

THE fortnight of Scudamore's visit to Basildene had scarcely elapsed, when Michael received one morning a letter bearing the Oxford postmark, which made his face grow suddenly very serious.

But we are anticipating. We must return to Chris, when he returned to college. That young man went back to Oxford in particularly gloomy spirits, thinking very

bitterly of the experiences of life which left him with foundered hopes, a rejected lover, before his one-and-twentieth birthday.

But he was not, as we know, a person capable of long-sustained melancholy ; his cheerful nature, assimilating the bright things only of life, was able to exist in a much more gloomy atmosphere than that of Oxford in term time, without yielding to the depression of its surroundings. He certainly passed many unhappy moments in sad and uncertain contemplation of Dulcie's photograph, and gave way to almost childish bursts of feeling at the thought of her evident partiality for some one else ; for Dulcie undeniably had won, in the impulsive young heart, the pre-eminent place of a great first-love, and first-love, whatever old people may say, has con-

secrated to it more passionate capacity for sorrow, and more vivid capabilities for loving, than any other sentiment of our lives.

But Chris Jocelyn would not have been himself, he would not have been the Chris whom Dulcie loved with so true and tender a self-sacrificing affection, if the capacity for developing into a love-sick swain had been in him. He had the healthily-constituted mind of youth; his nature threw off the carbonic acid of despair, and, instead, built up, with better material, plans for a renewal of his hopes in the future.

Meanwhile, Oxford-life was exceedingly pleasant, and his experiences at St. Aidans, and on the Welsh lakes last summer, with the tutor who was a boating-man, had earned him a place in his college eight, which, for the nonce, salved over many

other disappointments, and had a spice of revenge in it. If Dulcie had been kind to him, for her sake he would not have risked his knee in this exertion, but now, 'who cared,' he might as well take all the enjoyment that offered itself, and found that which had a savour of danger in it, the most fascinating sort.

Sometimes, as the Tudor eight skimmed over the cold winter water, with the pleasant rhythm of oars, and the exhilarating exertion brought the colour rushing to his face, and filled his frame with life and warmth, the boyish fancy would picture Dulcie standing on the college barge, and watching him, and imagine her, perhaps, relenting from her cruel decision at the sight,—Dulcie was so fond of physical excellence and muscular energy. Chris's azure eyes would shine at the thought,

and the river breeze would blow back the bright silver-flaxen curls under his cap, while the bronze hue deepened in his face, until the lad, who was not altogether unconscious of some merit in his appearance, might well have found good cause for his opinion had he known how goodly a figure in reality he cut.

Popular, of course, he was. Chris Jocelyn had never known what it was to go among people who did not vote him a capital fellow. His ringing laugh came to be in demand at every gathering in college where the best set was to be met, and senior men made much of the handsome boy, who was so perfect a gentleman and so first-rate a companion. Chris basked in the sunshine of such universal favour. Is it to be wondered at, that his troubles could not long weigh his spirits down?

When first he came up, the tutor who had been with him in Wales did his best to dissuade him from accepting the place offered him in the eight. Over-exertion of any sort might be a fatal evil to the weak knee, and rowing, even in Wales, had often proved more than was good for it. But prudence was at a discount when a place in his college Torpid was under consideration, and, at first, Chris found no especial inconvenience from his efforts.

Oxford was particular damp, and unhealthy that spring ; the floods were higher than usual, and a damp malarious mist frequently penetrated into the ground-floor on which young Jocelyn's sumptuously furnished rooms were situated.

Soon after his return to them, from the clear, bracing air of Basildene, the little cough, which everyone had noticed that

Christmas, but no one had been concerned about, seemed to develop into a chronic trouble. When prudent friends expostulated with him concerning the over-strain to which he was exposing his knee, Chris found an easy method of turning off their attack, by declaring, that it was the mist and damp which were likely to do him harm, rather than the exertion to his leg.

But the idea seemed preposterous, and one not for a moment to be entertained, of resigning his place, for the sake of a mere passing cold, as long as the knee did not prove troublesome ; and now the Torpid's week approached so near, that contingency appeared remote. Chris held out obstinately, in the face of a growing conviction ; it would be difficult, now, to find a substitute, he said, and, besides, a burning desire that Dulcie might see his name in the papers,

and perhaps be proud for him, gave him a dogged courage to persevere, even when he felt the exertion was becoming too much for him, and stroke, disappointed, was complaining loudly of his want of care. One day, returning in a sharp east wind to the barge, (Chris never knew quite how he managed to pull back the last few yards to it,) he fainted. It was a sudden collapse of the over-tried constitution, and the people around him had much difficulty in restoring him to consciousness.

When they got him back to his rooms, the agony in his knee and his violent fits of coughing so alarmed his friends and the attendant scout, that they began to inquire of one another, where young Jocelyn's people were, that they might be sent to.

Chris protested the whole of that day, that he would soon be 'all right;' he even sent for stroke, and begged him not yet to fill up his place in the Torpid, and insisted that he would have no one sent for, he had no friends in England who could come, but the Carwinions. He sat shivering, wrapped in a rug in his arm-chair by the fire, too worn out and ill to make the effort to go to bed, even when night-time came. A friend sat with him, and the anxious scout, who had a soft spot in his mercenary old heart for this young gentleman, who never 'slanged him,' and who was good-natured and generous, for all his rowdiness, hovered officiously near.

Early the next morning, instead of being 'all right,' the coughing ended in hemorrhage from the lungs, and Chris's existence was hovering between life and

death. It was then that Michael's address was discovered, and some one wrote that letter to him, which we have seen arrive at Basildene. Michael hurried to Oxford on the receipt of it, and remained there in anxious attendance upon Chris for six weeks. The dangerous lung trouble was aggravated by acute inflammation of the knee.

‘It is a hard matter to say which we fear the worse from,’ Michael wrote home. ‘The surgeons are of opinion, that eventually he must lose his leg. He has over-exerted it lately, and the joint threatens disease. They only delay the operation on account of his prostration, and their misgivings after the hemorrhage. They seem to dread more than anything a return of that. He has run down all at once. The doctors say it is a crisis in his life, and doubt

whether organic disease is not likely to be the more fatal part of the illness. When he is stronger, and the east wind changes, we must get him to Basildene.'

Michael enclosed in this letter a private note for his sister, in which he wrote :

' Chris has been telling me everything, and I know now what a noble, brave "little sis" you have been. Though the poor lad cannot understand, and is very troubled, I think I have long read between the lines, and know your secret. My brave Dulcie, you must still be prepared to be very courageous, there is trouble before us that we have never yet taken into account, even when the world looked its blackest. I can trust to your courage, but, truth to tell, my own sometimes fails me at the prospect. Chris knows nothing now of all this. We cannot speak yet to him of the

amputation : he could not bear the distress it must cause him ; and, since the last hemorrhage, he has been allowed to talk very little. Sometimes I fancy we shall never need to trouble him about it. Can you guess my worst fears from this ? They say consumption develops so rapidly at his age, and the injury to his lung seems incredibly severe, considering the good health he seemed to be in at Christmas. You must forget everything now, dear, in the face of this trouble, except your old sisterly care for him ; I know you will, and will make his return to Basildene a true home-coming.

‘We hear that Major Bultitaft is to arrive in England in June, for the poor lad’s coming of age, to arrange about the purchase of the Birkhall estate, in Somersetshire, for him, and that the Kitsons are

to follow Bultitaft in the autumn. It would be strange if their tardy interest in poor Chris's affairs should come too late.'

As if to add to the general misfortune, an unrelenting east wind swept over England for long weary weeks that spring, keeping the hedgerows, which had pushed forward their buds during the bright warmth of a few days early in March, in nipped detention, and almost winter bareness, until late in April. The half-opened violets perished prematurely in the lanes, where the village children, shivering under their wind-caught garments, hardly mustered up traditional enthusiasm enough in their appearance, to go in search of them. The white dust blew along the chalky Westernshire roads in clouds, and a hard grey dryness lay over the land.

Would the cruel wind never abate?

thought Dulcie, day after day, as she stood and watched the swaying, bare, black branches of the elm-trees from her window, and knew, in her intense anxiety of mind, that every day of protracted cold, and delayed sunshine, meant one chance the less for the beloved young life, in which her own was so entirely wrapped up. Dulcie was marvellously quiet and brave during the weeks which followed Michael's summons to Oxford. She constituted herself her father's amanuensis and help in everything, endeavouring to take her brother's place, since she saw how the bad news concerning Chris affected the old man's mind. In the absorbing effort to divert his thoughts, and avert the mad excitement that so frequently ended with Mr. Carwinion in weeks of helpless dejection, she found occupation to distract her from

fully realising the overwhelming trouble that approached.

One day, at last, at the beginning of May,—it seemed almost the first day of spring, and the first time for weeks that the sun had shone, and rudely buffeted nature had dared to raise up its head, —Michael and Chris came to Basildene.

The excitement of her preparations had kept Dulcie from the realisation of what this coming would actually reveal. She had read Michael's letters, and he had kept nothing back from her, but her mind had never yet consented to understand the change she was to see in Chris.

Her brother had calculated upon the shock. He held her arm with a warning touch when she came in to greet the invalid. Michael's warning hand strengthened the faltering bravery, and poor Dul-

cie even warmed to a smile over a sally of wit, at his own expense, from tired, pale-faced Chris, who was so truly glad to see her, that he forgot his doctor's injunctions, and all prudence, in his pleasure.

‘You must not talk now, old man, after your journey,’ Michael had to interrupt very quickly. ‘Dulcie, we must not tempt him to disobey. You will come back presently;’ for he felt the arm trembling on which his hand rested, and he knew that the strain of controlled feeling was too much, at least, for one of them.

Dulcie’s lips trembled a ‘Thank you,’ as he opened the door for her.

‘God, give me courage!’ she prayed, as she knelt presently, with her hands over her eyes, by her bedside.

Her temples throbbed, and her throat felt a great weight rise in it, but no tears

came yet as a relief. She was calm once more, and nerved for a great effort, when next she saw Chris that evening.

He was rested then, and the warmth of the room and excitement had flushed the hollow cheeks into a bright colour, which made him look more like the Chris of old times. He watched Dulcie a little anxiously, to see if she evinced any surprise over his changed appearance. Chris had not yet fully realised the extent of his illness. He knew that Michael, and his friends, and the doctors, had been very anxious, and that the disease from which he suffered would most likely affect him all his life ; but, that there were grounds for graver fears, no one had, as yet, told him, and he put off the suspicion from himself, as one too painful to be contemplated. It interested him now to study Dulcie's face.

Did the change in him strike her as anything very serious? Was she a little sorry now, perhaps, for having been so hard to him at Christmas?

All the old feelings for her had returned when he met her to-day. It was no good trying to think her unkindness had made him forget. Her sweet, grave face, the very intonation of her voice recalled everything that he had ever felt for her, however much he might try to imagine otherwise. He was a little aggrieved to see her so quiet now. Perhaps she did not think him very ill, after all. He was not exactly as pleased with that idea as he might have been; he had imagined his illness might have softened her. But—he wondered whether it was Scudamore she cared for! Would she be as kind and sympathetic now, while he was laid up, with

the remembrance of what he had said to her at Christmas still fresh in her memory, as she had been when he had the accident?

In accordance with Michael's injunctions, and because it best suited their own feelings then, they had talked to one another very little during the evening, though Michael left them a great part of the time alone together, and Mr. Carwinion, after being fussily solicitous, had at last gone out upon some parish matters.

When Dulcie stood up to say, 'Good-night,' Chris took both her hands, and held them for a moment.

'How cold you are, Dulcie!' he said, looking inquiringly into her face with the bright eyes that seemed circled by such terribly dark lines in the lamplight.

He wanted to see if she would meet his gaze, if there would be any explanation in

her face for all the evening's quiet, which puzzled him so much ; if she would understand him to imply that he found something else cold, besides the hands he held. The sharp outline of his features, the hollow cheeks, burning with unnatural colour, and the bright eyes, which seemed to have grown too big for the thin face,—she met his gaze, and saw these, and on a sudden the clear interpretation of each sign thrust itself upon her.

‘ Oh, Chris !’

She pulled away one hand hastily, and covered her eyes, for the long suppressed tears were welling up. A great sob shook her, and she rushed away out of the room.

Chris leaned back upon his couch wearily, a sort of undefined terror creeping over him, while the unutterable longing came into his heart to once more feel

strong enough to go after her, and comfort her in the only way which seemed good to him, while he heard the explanation of such conduct from her.

Dulcie sought refuge in the dimly-lighted dining-room, where Michael was sitting meditatively before a dying wood fire, smoking his pipe. Scarcely noticing his presence, she came and leaned upon the mantel-shelf, and gave way to a fierce, passionate fit of weeping, bending her head down over her hands, while her whole frame was shaken with her sobs. It was the wild outbreking of a long pent-up flood. Michael came and put his arm round her, but said nothing, until the storm had partly spent itself. Then he still waited, with unusual tact, under the circumstances, for her to speak first.

‘ Michael, Chris is dying,’ she said, in a

low, impressive voice, while she seemed to hear her own heart beat at the terribleness of such words.

Michael put his hand upon her head, and stroked gently the disordered hair, but he did not speak. His own eyes, just then, saw the dim lamplight through a blurred mist. What could he say that would comfort his sister in this trouble? Presently she raised her head, and looked at him with tearful eyes.

‘Speak, Michael. Tell me the worst. I can bear it all!’

Then he pulled himself together with an effort, and, still smoothing the soft hair, he told her.

‘A physician is coming from London next week to see him, and, after that, we shall know all that, humanly speaking, we can know. In my own opinion—for I will

not deceive you—I believe he would never rally, if the hemorrhage came again. That is my worst fear. Dulcie, dearest,’ added Michael, ‘for Chris’s sake, be brave! He knows nothing. How shall we tell him? How can we go through all that may be before us, if you give way? He depends on you. You do not know, childie, how much you are to him. That time when he was delirious, there was no other name on his lips but yours. You must give him courage to bear it, if he has to hear what I dread.’

‘Oh, Michael! Do you really dread it? Is it really as bad as that?’ She leaned her head on her brother’s shoulder, and the bitter grief, once more, would not bear to be controlled. ‘Perhaps he thinks I have been cruel, when I would die to-night, if it could make him live. Michael

Michael, I cannot live without him ! Can't you tell me that all this isn't true !' He held his arm around her tenderly, till the heaving sobs grew quieter. No word of comfort he might speak could soothe her like this silent sympathy. 'I may tell you all, Michael? It is a relief. Let me—I cannot bear it alone. Don't think me weak and foolish,' she said, presently, feeling for the hand which held her so lovingly, to press it in her own.

They stood together thus in silence, for a few minutes, the brother and sister, in mute sympathy, neither being able to trust to a voice for speech.

'Won't you go to bed now, dear?' her brother asked, at last, lifting back her hair from the hot forehead, to kiss her brow.

'You are so good to me, Michael,' she

said, in a low voice, turning to go, at his suggestion.

‘ Dear little Dulcie, who wouldn’t be good to you ?’

Those last words of his went on repeating themselves to her, when she got to her room, and haunted her in the stillness of the night, as she lay, with the load of a great fear weighing upon her heart, with weary, open, tear-stained eyes, watching for the dawn.

Michael stirred among the white ashes in the grate, and raised a little blaze, before which he finished another pipe, after his sister left him. He had thoughts enough to occupy his mind, as he watched the smouldering wood, he would not return immediately to Chris.

Long ago, Michael had guessed Dulcie’s

secret ; but it is one thing to surmise a matter like this, and another to have it confirmed by most painful evidence. Dulcie's passionate sorrow to-night had been like the reading out of a whole chapter in her life to him, and it had revealed a hopelessly sad prospect for her, it seemed to Michael, whatever result came to Chris's illness. If he recovered, what could the end be, of this attachment between them ? Could they, by any prospect, ever marry ? What influence, on Chris's future plans, would the arrival in England of the Kitsons have ?

Michael could not blind himself to the unsuitable elements that revealed themselves, when the situation was impartially considered. Were these two really calculated to make one another happy ?

Poor Chris! Perhaps Dulcie understood, less than anyone, what were the defects in his fascinating character. Could her life with him ever find all it so impulsively demanded: the rest, the satisfaction, the undivided love, which was the great need of her soul? How would it be, if ever she came to realise the blemishes in her idol? was this passionate love of hers strong enough to stand that inevitable test? Chris, too, would shortly have his own people around him, influencing his actions, and, most likely, judging unselfish Dulcie by their narrow standard of prejudice. And she was three fatal years his senior! Would Chris not, by-and-by, find out, that, after all, he had been mistaken, and, under pressure from the Kitsons, drift away from what he now imagined he felt

for her? Was Dulcie's happiness to be exposed to the chances of such shipwreck?

Michael's fancy wandered away to the gallery in the Haymarket, and pictured again Scudamore's dark face lighting up with quiet pleasure, as it had on a certain occasion, on a day not long ago. The comparison which this led to, resulted in Michael's knocking the ashes impatiently out of his pipe, and examining the bowl thereof as a diversion—for thoughts can become intolerable when pursued beyond certain limits, and then it is that they are best left alone. He put the pipe away, and leaned across the mantel-shelf, and smoothed the hair which he had wrought into great disorder, through his habit of running his fingers in it, when thinking very deeply. He smoothed it down, and

smoothed his ruffled feelings in the process, before he went away, to see if Chris had been settled comfortably for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SHADOW WHICH MAKES THINGS CLEAR.

God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,
 And thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our face,
 A gauntlet with a gift in't. Every wish
 Is like a prayer with God.

I had my wish.

Aurora Leigh.

A few evenings afterwards, Chris was to be found in the old school-room upstairs, which was conveniently near to his bedroom, playing chess with Mr. Carwinion, and apparently quite recovered from the fatigue of the journey to Basildene.

The physician from London had been

to see him, and had departed. The verdict upon his future, as far as human foresight and science could pronounce it, had been spoken, and yet we see him once again the bright, cheerful, buoyant-hearted lad, apparently, that we have known so long.

There are cushions piled upon the old green school-room sofa, red cushions, against which the sharp features are cut like a delicate cameo, in the meeting of the evening light and the fire-light, but he is sitting up from them, his thin hands moving among the chess-men, and the smiling eyes meeting the very devoted ones of his elderly companion.

The peculiar loveableness of the boy's character had evinced itself very plainly since he had seen the old vicar's sorrow and anxiety over his altered looks. Mr.

Carwinion's temperament was not one which easily concealed its emotions, and it had taken many days before he found them sufficiently under control, to be able to proffer his society to the invalid.

When he came, Chris received him so brightly, and made so much of him,—it was like his bright, happy nature to make others happy, even when their troubles were his own,—that the vicar's wandering memory almost forgot what it had been which had been disturbing him, and he came to regard his companionship as a tremendous success.

Chris laughed, and chaffed him, and talked more than discretion permitted, as he made his moves upon the chess-board, while the elder man's thin timorous laugh, joining with the boy's, was the re-

newal of a sound, that had almost ceased to be heard in the vicarage.

‘There goes your castle!’ laughed Chris, suppressing the cough that brought his companion’s pained look perpetually upon him.

‘Dear, dear! I was looking to the queen, and never saw it. I’m not your match at this, Chris. I have got rusty. There was a time when I knew better what I was about than to do a thing like that. My memory’s bad! Boy, how bad that cough is! What is Moore doing for it? I used to take liquorice-tea, when I had a cough. Couldn’t Dulcibel have some made for you? Dulcibel is a bad nurse not to think of it. Liquorice-tea would stop that, if only she had the good sense to think of it.’

Dulcie came into the room just at that moment.

‘Father, Mr. Brown is in your study, come to see you about the new church-rate. Can you go to him?’

‘Check!’ interrupted Chris, triumphantly.

‘Ah, so it is! Well, it will be “mate” next move, so that is my death-warrant, and Solomon Brown has sent for me at the right moment.’ The vicar rose reluctantly. He stood for a moment with his hand affectionately on Chris’s shoulder, as though unwilling to leave him. ‘Dulcibel, this boy has a nasty cough,—a very nasty cough. I don’t know where you all are, not to hear it. I think you overlook it, when you talk about his knee. He ought to have liquorice-tea made for him. You should think of it. You’re not a

good nurse, Dulcibel! You haven't the memory of your old father for such things, and it's these little things show the good nurse. Will you see to it? There's liquorice always in my study cupboard. This cough must not be neglected, as it is!'

'Awfully good stuff, sir, is liquorice-tea,' said Chris, laughing. 'Why didn't we think of it before? But I have all sorts of mixtures and elixirs. You must not imagine they neglect me, Mr. Carwinion. You all make too much fuss over me here. Dulcie is my best of nurses. I often wonder what I shall do when my people carry me off into their unsympathetic clutches.'

'Tush, lad!' the vicar said, smiling to hear these sentiments, which so exactly suited his wishes. 'Tush! we should have

managed to keep you in better health ; there has been a failure somewhere, and it grieves me more than I can say. You are your father's own son, Christie. But I must go to Solomon Brown. See to the liquorice-tea for him, my child. Don't forget it !'

' Shall I put away the chess-men ? You won't play any more to night, will you ?' asked Dulcie.

There had been a certain constraint between her and Chris, since the night when she had left him alone so abruptly. She knelt down now on the rug before the tall fender, a relic of nursery days, and began placing the little ivory figures in their boxes. They were a set of beautifully carved Indian chess-men, that Major Bultitaft had sent home to his ward long ago, and each fitted into its own elaborate

little sandal-wood case. Dulcie arranged them with the minute care which obviated the necessity of speaking, while the flickering blaze from the fire still disputed the privilege of illuminating the dim room with the fading light from the window. It played on the sunny head bent over the little carved boxes, and on the pale face of the boy upon the sofa. Perhaps it was the attraction of the light upon her hair that made Chris suddenly lay his hand upon it, and say :

‘Do you know, Dulcie, you haven’t allowed me to have you alone to talk to since the day I came here? I want so much to know what it was that made you rush away suddenly that night, when I told you your hands were cold. Was there any great secret about it? I have been puzzling to find out ever since, and

you've made a point of giving me no chance of asking.'

He slipped his hand from her hair on to her shoulder, and looked straight at her half-averted face. Dulcie held the white queen in her hand, and strange fancies concerning the adventures of that royal lady, with Alice in Looking-glass Land, came into her mind, and she twisted her round upon her pedestal without answering. A little jet of gas provoked a noisy flash of flame in the grate behind her; Chris's hand still rested on her shoulder, and his eyes still vainly sought to meet hers. Yet she did not speak.

Then Chris put out his other hand, and possessed himself of her white majesty. He felt tempted to end her career, by tossing her into the fire, but refrained, possibly out of consideration for Major Bultitaft's

feelings. He was going to say something that would cost him an effort, and it would have been easier to say it, after relieving himself at the expense of the poor white queen's existence. But he grasped her instead by her crown, most vindictively, and beat time to his words while he spoke, with her stand upon the sofa, (he rather wished he might break her). He kept his other hand still on Dulcie's shoulder.

'I know all about it, Dulcie,' he said. 'I know why you can't speak now and answer me, and I know it's brutal of me to try to make you. I know you won't look at me, because there are tears in your eyes. I made Moore stay back, and tell me everything. Why should they have left it to you? But you are spared it, Dulcie. I have heard the worst now. I know that at the outside they give me a year or two. If

I get the hemorrhage again, they won't give me as many days. My knee will make me a cripple, I ought to lose it, but they won't trouble about that now. Moore and Dyson are both of the same opinion. They are sure the end isn't far off.'

Chris closed his eyes for one moment, while he still unconsciously tapped the chess-man in his left hand, and the right one, that lay on Dulcie's shoulder, rested there a little heavily. His voice had been almost brusque as he spoke.

'Did you think something like this the first night, Dulcie?' he asked, after a pause, and opening his eyes again.

Still she could not answer. An impulse prompted her, and she slipped her hand into the one that held the little white queen, and Chris, presently, lifted it to his

lips, and kissed the trembling fingers.

The kiss roused Dulcie. In all their long friendship, Chris had never before done such a thing. Five minutes ago she would have resented the action with indignation measured by her determination to sacrifice her love for Chris's good. Now the whole aspect of her resolve seemed changed, there was another future, another method of sacrifice to be contemplated; life was different, things must be clear between them for the short henceforward that remained.

The kiss was as the awakening to the reality of what, before, had been but a dim shadow of foreboding. It began a new life.

'I could not speak before, Chris,' she said, while their hands still clasped one another, in the unrestrained emotion of the

moment. ‘God help me! Oh, Chris! It is breaking my heart! Yes. They told me everything yesterday, and I knew it before.’ Chris was about to speak again, but she interrupted him. The generous impulse, that rose with a great longing in her heart, must not be superseded by any words of his. ‘Last winter—do you remember?—you asked me to give you a promise. You spoke about your future, and wanted me to be something in it, something that I could not be, then, because it seemed you had all your life before you, and I was so much older than you, and only a country vicar’s daughter, while you were going to be rich, and have everything in the world, without me. But, Chris dear;’ Dulcie turned away her head here, and spoke almost inaudibly. ‘I loved you then. I—I—loved you so much, I would not give you

what was not good for you. I loved you too much to spoil your life with my love. But, all is different now. Chris, will it make things happier for you, if I tell you the truth? I don't know whether I ought to, but I must speak, I must tell you everything. Is it too late?' she asked, appealingly. 'Will you let me say it, now? I must, never mind what you answer me. Oh, Chris! I love you, I have loved you always! May I tell it you at last, with this great trouble hanging over us?'

'Dulcie, is it true?' said Chris, his face irradiated with the great joy of such knowledge, yet speaking incredulously still. 'Oh, my Dulcie! My dear, sweet, noblest of Dulcies! Were you so unwise as all that? I understand now. It is too much! Too good!'

The wan lines of sickness and pain seemed almost to disappear, and he put

both his arms around her, and drew the troubled face towards his own radiant one. Their lips met in the first sweet sacrament of love—love that was so blissful, and all-satisfying on his part, that the dark shadow of death, which had revealed it to him, was lost in the brightness of its revelation ; but love that to her was eclipsed of half its gladness by the terrible reality of the presence which accompanied it, and alone made its declaration possible. There can be small satisfaction in intruding upon them during the short half-hour that followed, while the daylight gradually disappeared in the west, and in which those two, sitting together, hand clasped in hand, learned at last, from one another, the truth so long concealed.

The grim shade which hovered over them, could not rob entirely of its blissful-

ness this moment in their lives—the future may not so far intrude its forebodings, as to deprive a perfect present of its capacity to satisfy. Even Dulcie—as she knelt with her face so near to his, and those beloved arms around her, and heard the love and tenderness poor Chris knew only too well how to express—felt she could afford to defy her fears, and exclaim, with Tennyson's hero,

‘Then let come, come what may,
What matter if I go mad!
I shall have had my day!’

The last streak of red in the west was fading behind the elm-trees, and the school-room was nearly in darkness, before Dulcie found courage to break the spell of this great, new-found happiness. At last she rose to light a lamp. The voices of Mr. Carwinion and Michael, who had been into

the village with Solomon Brown, and were returning, now made themselves audible under the window.

‘We must tell them,’ exclaimed Chris, gaily.

‘Oh, Chris, have I done right in telling you? What can be the end of it?’ she said, with a self-conscious flush coming into her face at the notion of this long-kept secret of hers becoming, at last, public property.

Chris found his crutches, and came over to the window where she had gone.

‘I’m a poor sort of a wreck to be introduced as pretty Miss Carwinion’s lover,’ he said, looking something like his old merry, handsome self, as he came towards her. ‘I wonder what Mrs. Purcell will have to say on the subject. But I know what the end must be, if you will let it. I’m twenty-one

next month, my darling, and they give me, in their hopeful generosity, another year to live——’

The exertion of walking brought his cough back, and put an abrupt end to what he was going to say. He leaned against the window-sill, with Dulcie standing by him, looking very helpless and miserable while the paroxysm lasted. The tall young form, that so short a while before had been full of physical strength and excellence, was shaken by the cruel effort now demanded of it, and when, at length, the coughing ceased, he slipped into the nearest chair, panting for breath, and presently trying to smile a reassuring smile into his companion’s anxious face.

‘Never mind. It’s over now! We’ll have liquorice-tea ready for the next occasion. Don’t look so frightened, dear one.

That cough spoilt my pretty speech ! I must tell you by-and by.'

'Sunny darling, don't talk now. Hark ! here is Michael coming. Come back to the sofa. You will let me tell him, won't you ?'

Dulcie had assumed a tone of playful possession over him, and made a futile attempt at not looking very mournful.

'Stay here,' said Chris, rather faintly, putting his arm round her as Michael opened the door.

He felt more equal to the effort of what was to come if he did not waste superfluous breath by over-much movement, and he held Dulcie tightly to him, as if the force of his grasp must make up for other feebleness. They both looked very much like naughty children, surprised at a forbidden game, when Michael came into the

room and found them together by the window.

‘Michael,’ said Chris, ‘Dulcie and I have been telling one another secrets——’

He looked quite boyish and shy as he spoke, and the blue eyes, after beginning by a brave enough stare at the young clergyman, suddenly turned to Dulcie to learn how he was to continue.

‘We have found out that we love one another, and we are going to make one another happy for a little while.’

Dulcie stood by his side, and felt the tight clasp of his arm making her very brave to meet her brother’s face. Would Michael be disappointed, and think her a coward, after all? Young Carwinion imagined that he was looking very severe, as he inquired :

‘What does this mean, Dulcie?’ and

walked over, and surveyed the fire, feeling strangely perplexed.

After a while he felt himself relenting, as he looked again at the two standing together, their faces telling each a history ; for he thought, first of his own hopes, which were likely to be soon happily realised, and then of the doctor's serious face yesterday, and his reluctant verdict of ill tidings. It might be cruel kindness, but was it for him to take it on himself to deny to these two a happiness which, at its best, could but be limited by weeks, or months, at the outside.

He shrank a little when he reflected on the prospect which it involved for Dulcie, but the thought did not make his 'God bless you, Chris, old fellow ! I am glad of it,' any the less sincere ; and that was all he said just then. By-and-by, he spoke to his sister.

‘I am glad that you will make him happy, dear. You know the worst, you know you have nothing but the present. I do not think you have done wrong. There is no sacrifice now, but your own. You do not grudge that, Dulcie, do you? Only we must never entertain his quixotic notions of your marrying; not, at least, until his people come to England. You know such a thing as that would involve many difficulties, and it could not fail to be misinterpreted.’

‘I know, and *this* is enough, Michael. I can be contented,’ said Dulcie. She was kneeling by his side in the study, as they talked. ‘I couldn’t have lived on, with the knowledge of what is coming, without telling him the truth. I am contented now. You need not fear for me. It was only when I feared you would be vexed, Michael, that I was at all afraid. Now,—I

never knew before what it was to be perfectly happy—for I can be happy, even with this future. It seems enough that he should know, that there should be no more misunderstandings. I cannot think of the future, yet.'

CHAPTER IX.

MAJOR BULTITAFT COMES HOME.

Ah, even thus

I've seen my fondest hopes decay.

HONOURABLE MRS. NORTON.

THOSE long east winds of March and April had been holding nature back for an unusually glorious awakening and spell of sunshine, through the glad months of May and June, which were to follow. When at last the bonds of a cold late spring-time were broken, sprouting nature, leaf and flower, quickened and burst forth with

magic brilliancy. Day after day one seemed to see the green hue, growing brighter over the beech-trees and the chestnuts, while in the blue ether, against which the young green gleamed, floated soft fleeces of the clouds, which at this season are 'highest up in heaven.'

Fallacious hopes awoke, too, with the bright warm weather; the opinions of the cleverest doctors have been found to err at times, and Chris gained strength, in this new happiness of his, to limp about out of doors in the sunshine, and the wearying cough disappeared.

'You will be well enough to keep high festival on your birthday, after all, old chap!' Michael was tempted into saying; and letters came from India, arranging that Chris should spend the following winter in Madras, whither, his relations

fully made up their mind, he was to grow strong enough, through this summer, to travel.

One morning, there came the grating of the old Milcot fly-wheels on the drive under the vicarage windows, and the noise of that cumbersome vehicle turning round by the front-door. It was a morning when the bees were noisily busy with the lilacs and lime-trees in the sunny garden; a morning full of balmy brightness and content. The vicarage looked particularly charming just then, with its background of young elm leaves, and its foreground of sunshine, bees, and flowers; and the old gentleman who alighted from the Milcot fly, and rang the vicarage front-door bell, seemed to have caught a large share of the general radiance in his smiling, old sun-burnt face, or to have a store of sunshine

within him, which beamed out from the twinkling eyes.

‘My man, here’s a sovereign for you! It isn’t every day in the week that you drive me to Basildene,’ said the bright little gentleman, smiling benignly at the astonished local Jehu. ‘You’ve got a poor screw of a horse, there. I could have walked as fast to Basildene, if I had but known the way. Don’t thank me for the money, man! Hate thanks! Put it by to get a decent animal with. There, there! this is an exceptional occasion—exceptional occasion! Good-morning to you. Good-morning. Young woman, are they all at home?’

The staid domestic, who had first come to Basildene when Mrs. Carwinion came home there as a bride, and who had remained ever since, and watched her mis-

tress's motherless children grow up to man and womanhood, was at a loss to understand the ways of this excitable old gentleman, who addressed her as 'young woman,' and who appeared on such excellent terms with the dishonest flyman from Burfitt's.

'Who was it you wished to see, sir?' asked Ann, with some dignity, as the cab, with much noise, took its departure.

'Everyone, to be sure!' said the visitor, smiling to think how he was puzzling this servant, and how well she would have to know him presently. 'Who is at home? Mr. Jocelyn in?'

The old gentleman said the name in a lowered voice, almost as though he were mentioning a secret. In fact, it did seem to him as though, by asking for Mr. Jocelyn so soon, he were playing his best trump card over-hastily.

‘Mr. Jocelyn doesn’t go out much, sir. Will you step inside, into the drawing-room? What name shall I give, sir?’

‘You may take him my card, young woman: Major Bultitaft’s card, Madras Native Infantry. He didn’t expect me for a fortnight, but he’ll know who I am.’

Ann closed the drawing-room door upon the visitor, and then indulged in a furtive glance at the card, which bore the name the little gentleman had given, before she proceeded to carry it up to Mr. Jocelyn. This person was of a different type to the ordinary visitors at the vicarage, and Ann had a peculiar prejudice against the ‘military.’

The major, meanwhile, settled himself on the edge of a tall, straight chair, crossed his highly-polished boots, which his short legs barely permitted to reach the floor,

and remained in that position, contemplating the room for several seconds, literally on the tiptoe of expectation. But the anticipation of the moment was too supreme a one, and the man was too entirely self-conscious, to permit of his remaining in such placid expectancy until Ann's return. He got off his high perch, and strutted to the window; perhaps young Jocelyn was in the garden, the major was a trifle deaf, and had not noticed the servant's remark, that Mr. Jocelyn seldom went out, and now the idea occurred to him, that he might first see his ward coming across that strip of garden, or in the field beyond. Perhaps he would vault the rails, and come suddenly into the house, into the room, without seeing his guardian's card, without knowing who it was he encountered in the drawing-room.

The major tucked his thumbs into his waist-coat pockets, and almost chuckled ; if he had not heard Ann's cotton-dress rustling down the stairs, I believe he might have laughed aloud, for poor Major Bultitaft, who had always been over-burdened with his own society, during his fifty years of military service, was given to laughing and talking in such limited company. The sound of Ann's approach, however, necessitated a suppression of the chuckle, and his fancy, picturing an unannounced encounter with Chris, faded. Jocelyn was probably following close upon the servant, and the major, not moving from the window, stood 'at attention,' and awaited the opening of the door. But the cotton-gown fluttered off in another direction, and, while the major heard other doors opened

and shut, that of the drawing-room still remained closed.

‘I’ve come too early, most likely,’ he remarked aloud to himself, pulling out his watch. ‘Half-past eleven—calling hours won’t be the same as in Madras. A bad beginning. He’ll think I don’t know common manners. The lad won’t know I was so keen to see him, I couldn’t wait for the one o’clock train!’

The good old soldier was so agitated by this reflection, that it necessitated his blowing a loud blast into the depths of a bright silk handkerchief, which had been conspicuous before in his breast-coat pocket. His heart was beginning to mis-give him, he had so long looked forward to this day, and every attendant circumstance, which he had anticipated, was failing him now in actual experience.

He took up a little album that was lying on a work-table, and turned its leaves, to try to divert his uncomfortable thoughts. At the second page, he came upon a portrait which he knew very well. It was a photograph of Chris, taken in Vévay, a life-like picture of the boy, who had been, at that time, a very fair type of the strong, athletic young Englishman. It was the last photograph Chris had ever had taken.

Bultitaft contemplated it, until serenity once more took possession of his weather-beaten old face. Jocelyn was a ward to be proud of, and how much this handsome boy was like the poor father, who had died in good Bultitaft's arms. Yet the boy's face was fairer, and less proud. The major wondered :

‘Will the lad ever consent to be a son to me? Will he ever love a bluff old

fellow like me?' and turned on, to look at the opposite photograph, which was one of Dulcie Carwinion. A pretty face had a great attraction for the old gentleman; this one in particular pleased him, because he at once jumped to the conclusion that it was the portrait of some one Jocelyn cared for, and the idea did not occur to him that it might be Miss Carwinion. The major stood smiling, and was giving this handsome pair a mental benediction.

Meanwhile, Ann was seeking vainly for either Mr. Carwinion or Michael. On that balmy June morning, Chris was sitting, wrapped in a large Scotch maud, before the open window of the school-room, watching the drifting white fleeces of the clouds, and the gentle movement of young nature in the soft west breeze, with that listless inertia of weakness which is satis-

fied with no more active occupation. There was a novel lying open in the window-seat, and a garden-hat of Dulcie's by its side, and her big black cat was on a cushion, purring softly in large contentment at the sunshine, and the presence of noisy flies upon the window-panes, which he was too fat and well-liking to trouble himself to do more than watch lazily out of his half-closed eyes. Ann had bustled into this peaceful scene with the mysterious visitor's card.

‘Major Bultitaft,—by Jove! Have you told Mr. Carwinion he's here? Ask them to see him first.’

Chris felt so weary and listless himself, that the task of encountering this unknown guardian alone seemed utterly out of the question.

‘I'm afraid they're all out, sir.’

But Ann, seeing poor Chris's weak inability to entertain visitors, and having also deep misgivings as to the intentions of a stranger, who addressed her as 'young woman,' took it upon herself to institute a fruitless search for 'Mr. Michael,' in whose shrewdness she shared the traditional confidence of the Carwinion family, before she at last consented to bow to the inevitable, and go again to the drawing-room to ask Major Bultift to 'walk upstairs.'

'Mr. Jocelyn's been ill, young woman, hasn't he?' asked the major, as he followed this very taciturn domestic. 'I hope he's quite well again by now.'

Yet the old gentleman's hopes were being overbalanced by his fears, since he had been asked this way to meet his ward.

'Ill, sir? Yes,' remarked Ann, laconic-

ally. Her opinion of the visitor sank still lower at this proof of how greatly he stood in ignorance of Mr. Jocelyn's affairs. 'He's not allowed to talk much, nor to be excited. You'll please be careful, sir;' and Ann, with much severity, opened the school-room door, and ushered 'Major Bultitaft' into the presence of young Jocelyn.

Chris had heard their approach, and had taken his crutches; he had risen from his chair, and was leaning upon them, as his guardian came towards him. The major marched a step or two into the room, too much overcome by the long-anticipated event he now found himself realising to apprehend exactly what it was he saw before him.

He stopped, involuntarily, half-way towards Chris; it seemed as though an

apoplexy were overtaking him, the blood rushed into his sallow face, the bristles of iron-grey hair, brushed fiercely forward from the bald poll, seemed to stand up more fiercely than ever.

‘Christopher,’ said the major, his voice faltering a little, for he had come fresh from his contemplation of the brave young fellow’s photograph downstairs. ‘Christopher Jocelyn?’

‘Your servant, sir!’ said the same bright, cheery voice we knew in more hopeful days.

Chris had grown accustomed to his changed self, and did not realise the effect his appearance had upon his guardian. But the major did not quite lose heart yet. He had not cherished his hopes so long for them to end in this way.

‘You have been ill, sir. You haven’t got well yet?’

‘Not yet, thank God!’ said the boy. ‘They tell me I am to get well in another world, Major Bultitaft.’

‘Good heavens!’ said the major, dropping into the chair he had been grasping. ‘Good heavens! Do not tell me so, Christopher!’

Chris resumed his chair too, and looked at the major.

‘Guardian, I’m glad you’ve come home,’ he said. ‘I’m a disappointing wreck, but I’m very glad to see you.’

The voice awoke an echo in the old man’s ears, an echo of something which had long since been lost in the depths of the Rattee jungle.

‘Jocelyn’s voice,’ he said, and glanced again at the lame, frail-looking lad before him, only to find his hopes once more revolt at this realization of them. Yet,

somehow, his glance this time lingered, and a likeness that he never saw so strikingly afterwards, recalled Colonel Jocelyn vividly to his mind.

‘ You must forgive me, Christopher—I wasn’t prepared for this. Good heavens ! how like your father you are ! ’ he exclaimed, with a sob in his voice. ‘ This lameness, these crutches, this illness of yours—what does it all mean ? Who says you are not to get well ? ’

Chris closed his eyes, and, for one instant, a weak, helpless feeling, that in a woman would have found relief in tears, came over him. The pained expression that had clouded Major Bultitaft’s erst-radiant countenance haunted him, and gave fresh reality to the words which he had just spoken.

The major was a man of few words, most

inadequate in speech in an emergency, and it is uncertain how long the silence might have lasted between them, if a subsequent remark had depended upon his conversational tact. But Chris had too long had his plans ready for his guardian's return to be altogether disconcerted by the painfulness of this first interview. He recovered himself in a second or two, and spoke out impulsively, in the old, cheery tone,

‘Major Bultitaft, I am very glad you are come,’ he said. ‘I often wondered where, and how it would be, I should first see you. I never thought it would be like this. It is strange, perhaps, you’ll think, but I’m not at all miserable. Do I look it? I’m engaged, major! and I want you to give your consent to it, and to make things straight for us. I know that I cannot live long, but, guardian, you can make the

time that's left very happy. That is, if you will——'

Major Bultitaft rose from the seat he had taken, and walked up and down the room somewhat rapidly, vouchsafing no reply. A second sudden revelation is apt to lose its startlingness, following too close upon the heels of its predecessor. It is to be doubted whether the major quite understood the drift of Chris's last remark, so many of the poor man's own ideas and plans were tottering down one by one, in hopeless ruins around him.

'Christopher!' he said, at last, drawing up short in front of the invalid's chair. 'You can never know what all this means to me. My boy, I have worked and saved, though I know you haven't needed it, it has been something I could do for the future, and for you. I thought you would be a son

to me in my old age. I've been a homeless, unloved old fellow, all my days, but I've looked to this. When things have been too much for me, and the whole mess has been against me, I had this to look forward to, that one day I could explain to you, and you would understand the cross old major, and might be fond of him, as no one ever has been, since the day those black devils took my father from me, and I got my commission over his poor bullet-riddled head.'

The Irish accent, which had gradually been waxing evident, asserted itself more and more prominently in his speech as he went on :

'I've thought of nothing else, Christopher, since the day I gave in to your mother, and consented to let you come here, but whether these Carwinions

wouldn't take you away from me. And now, you say, good heavens, that I've got to lose you, and I see it in your face, sure that it is the truth! Boy, I might as well die, too, for all there'll be left for a lone old man to live for, when you're gone.'

The whole story of a lifetime revealed itself in the disjointed language. It was an explanation for the years in which he had voluntarily allowed himself to be misunderstood. Poor Chris's horror of seeing people in distress quite overcame any awkwardness he might have otherwise experienced in hearing this confession. He held out his hand to the agitated old man, and the irresistible fascination of those marvellous eyes, which smiled sorrowfully, and yet most winningly, half increased, and then wholly banished the trouble for the moment.

‘You are very good. I shall live long enough to be grateful, sir!’ he said, giving the major’s hand a hearty grasp.

Poor major! he would have given worlds, just then, to be more ready of speech. If it had not been for the intense sorrow he had been experiencing, he would have felt extremely foolish and self-conscious at that moment, and rather ashamed of himself, for his late unwonted show of feeling. His silence, he felt, was so awkward, and yet there was too great a load at his heart, just then, for speech to be possible. He walked to the window, and stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat-pocket, and surveyed the outside prospect, his mouth even screwing itself up for the unmelodious whistle, with which Major Bultitaft was known, in solitary moments, to soothe himself when agitated.

He looked at the lime-tree outside, and heard the bees humming in it, but the sunshine and sound all seemed to have but one tale to tell him, he discerned neither beauty nor music in them, over everything seemed to be written the decree :

‘ Your ward, Christopher Jocelyn, is dying. There is no hope for you ; you must end your days as you have lived them—a solitary, unloved old man.’

It is hard for the old to lose their cherished hopes ; the young may build for themselves fresh castles in phantom Espagne, the old never can. Once the hope of their old age totters and fails them, life for them must go on to the end without anything to replace it, save, indeed, the hope, that some can still trust to, in a Beyond the approaching grave. Chris had no heart to interrupt the soliloquy of his

guardian, he felt quite unequal to doing so ; for he had begun to see this strange, narrow-minded comrade of his father in a new light, and to feel a deep pity and attraction towards the bluff, kindly old man.

Presently Michael, coming upstairs two steps at a time, in search of the visitor, whose arrival had just been announced to him, came into the room, and put an end to the interview between Chris and his guardian. Then the bluff soldier made a desperate effort, and became once more his practical imperturbable self. He talked with unusual volubility when once his ward had introduced him to young Carwinion, and explained at once how it came about that he had been in such entire ignorance of the disastrous turn which Chris's illness had taken. Travelling from

Madras by an earlier boat than the one he previously had arranged upon, only one of Michael's letters from Oxford had reached Rattee before he started.

'I had come to ask Christopher to go with me to inspect this proposed purchase for him at Birkhill, but of course that is out of the question for the present.'

No inducements that could be offered him, would persuade the major to accept the hospitality of the Carwinions, and remain their guest at the vicarage.

'I'm a fussy old Indian. I'm best left to take care of myself, with a landlady whom I can worry and scold as I choose. If I can't find lodgings to suit me in Basildene, I'll go to an hotel at Westerbury.'

However, the 'fussy old Indian' managed to make himself content with Mrs. Solo-

mon Brown's limited accommodation at Clay Farm, and he came in and out, henceforth, at the vicarage, daily, according to his own pleasure.

It would be making too long a story were I to dwell upon the quiet, restful time which followed Major Bultitaft's arrival at Basildene. They were uneventful days, and yet the small details of them are some of the best remembered in the lives of many of the persons in whom we are interested. Sunshine in the 'leafy month of June,' and vacillating hope and fear, this was the atmosphere in which our friends just then lived.

When Major Bultitaft made Dulcie Carwinion's acquaintance, he bowed before the spell which had subdued his youthful ward. If sanctioning Chris's engagement with a Fuegian could, in any way, have

added to the boy's happiness, the major would not have been the man to say him 'nay,' much less was it in his heart to refuse his benediction when he met the fair original of the portrait in the plush album.

Dulcie's sweet face, over which happiness and foreboding now contended for the mastery, took the old gentleman's heart by storm. True, he was unused to ladies' society, and felt strangely bashful, when he at first found himself alone with her. He did not venture to mention her engagement then, but he caught himself several times staring absent-mindedly at the large diamond ring she wore, and which he remembered to have belonged to Colonel Jocelyn. This was evidently the betrothal pledge with which Chris had elected to present her.

Dulcie's eyes met his once, as he turned

them hastily from the glittering jewel, and, knowing that their thoughts were in unison, she impulsively confided to him the story of her once willing renunciation, and now half fearful happiness. The major lent a sympathetic ear, for nothing wins shy people more than unsolicited confidence. The flood-gates of his own troubles became unpent by this opening to him of hers.

He and Dulcie, walking in the grassy paths of the old kitchen garden, amid rows of early peas and patches of white strawberry blossom, found much to say unreservedly to one another after this beginning. For the lonely old soldier, by way of sympathy, unburdened the long-kept secrets of his own life to her, telling her his experiences of the Mutiny, and of his rise from the ranks, of his friendship with

Colonel Jocelyn, and lastly, and sadly, of his anticipations in his guardianship of Chris.

He spoke of the invested savings, and of the future he had looked for, and then, speaking very curtly, he told her of the great emptying of his life's prospects, and of the dull lonely days which must for ever follow this loss that seemed inevitable. From that day forth, Dulcie and the major were to be fastest of friends together, a mutual sympathy and sorrow uniting them, though they never again spoke upon these subjects, so sacred to them both. Major Bultitaft, too, conceived an immense fancy for Michael.

'I never could abide a parson before, Christopher. The sight of our chaplain was always like a red rag to me; but young Carwinion here's made after a pattern

they don't allow to get too common among 'em,' he confided one day to his ward. 'The old man, now—well, he must have altered, or your father never would have, —but, good Lord! how the old fellow worries me with his prating!'

For, those two good old gentlemen mutually considered one another intolerable nuisances, with whom society at Basildene, at that time, could very conveniently have dispensed. Poor Chris, who was the object of their rivalry and solicitude, had often much ado to keep up even an appearance of peace between them, and to offend neither, by refusing to accept their too officious services and suggestions.

As time went on, in the hopes which were engendered by that long bright spell of glorious summer, the major began to

plan to carry off his ward, and have him to himself, for a change, at the sea-coast. For, to those whose watching shaped things according to their own wishes, Chris appeared to be gaining strength, and to be dissipating the dread of that catastrophe which had once seemed so imminent.

CHAPTER X.

A HOPELESS DAWN.

When some belovèd voice, that was to you
 Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
 And silence, against which you dare not cry,
 Aches round you like a strong disease, and new,—
 What hope? what help? what music will undo
 That silence to your sense?

Substitution—E. B. BROWNING.

BUT 'l'homme propose et Dieu dispose,'
 and, almost as the portmanteaux were pre-
 paring for the packing, nature took her
 revenge for her long good-natured drought,
 and opened the heavens for rain. The
 farmers, then, whose hay-crops were not
 gathered, had to bemoan their evil luck,
 for leaden skies, chilly winds, and long

swathes of rotting meadow-grass were the prospects which replaced the sunshine, through the length and breadth of the land.

Instead of sunning himself at Charmouth or Lulworth, in undisputed possession of his ward's society, the old Indian officer found himself shivering in his overcoat, and denouncing the English climate from the windows of Clay Farm, in company with a very melancholy British agriculturalist.

And to him there came the ill-tidings one morning, that the changed weather had brought back grave symptoms to the invalid, and that, in fear of worse to come, Doctor Moore had been hastily sent for to the vicarage. The worst fears were not realised though, and hemorrhage did not reappear ; it was a slight case of pneumonia with which his nurses had to con-

tend. Dr. Moore looked grave, but said there was no need for deep anxiety ; this relapse should have been guarded against, if possible, only young Jocelyn was not always prudent, and since it was here,—well, doctors never will speak out conclusive verdicts.

Three or four days of unspoken anxiety passed by ; soft rain fell incessantly without, a grey shadow over a gloomy land, and inside, with drawn blinds and hushed footsteps, a still gloomier shade rested in the vicarage. Then, life being strong, in spite of organic weakness, the patient revived, and the fever disappeared. The shadow too vanished with it ;—after all, what was it that everyone had been so nervously fearing ? Chris was getting better again.—There was an understood arrangement, a rule that had never been made,

and yet which everyone unconsciously agreed to, that, in the hour of the evening twilight, Chris and Dulcie should be left undisturbed by themselves.

They were lovers in little else than the now outspoken expression of a feeling which so long had existed between them. Dulcie would sit with her hand held in Chris's, and there was small need then of talking. They were all in all to one another, the hand-clasp told them that, and they had no future to plan for, as other lovers have.

It was one evening, after Dr. Moore had been, and had pronounced himself satisfied with his patient's progress, that these two sat together, and watched a rainy sunset. They saw the yellow sun go down behind a stormy cloud, and Chris, with Dulcie's hand in his, broached a subject which had before been a dead-

letter between them, and spoke to her of Janet West. It was a sort of confession, which it had been on the poor fellow's mind to make lately.

‘Pretty little Janet! I don’t think I ever was in love with her. I wanted to amuse myself, and make the fellows think well of me. It was hateful, wasn’t it? I know I was weak and despicable, but I was mad over my own folly with you that winter. And—and—I meant to do anything, rather than get her into disgrace on my account. She’s married to Blackett now. I never had pluck enough to tell you, when she wrote to say she was engaged to him. I was feeling too badly used over it. Poor old Blackett! He was in earnest, after all, and turned up trumps, in the end. I hope he’ll make her happy! Dulcie, I’ve never spoken to you a word

about her before, since that day I came from Endbourne, but I've meant to, often. What do you think of me, for a procrastinating coward, little woman,—eh?

‘Poor Chris, what should I think of you? What do I? Must I make confession in return? Will telling you what a coward I was in giving you up, how I almost broke down when you spoke to me at Christmas, satisfy you? For I cannot tell you anything else. When I think of love, it is always you—you, my own old Sunny!’

Happy last evening of perfect confidence, when confession could answer confession, and be satisfied of perfect understanding and friendship, in the long clasp of hands and looks which were ‘more eloquent than words,’ while the rainy sun sank down behind the dark wall which threat-

ened an evil to-morrow, and the last day of their short-lived hopefulness wore to its close! That night, a little cough, a lingering trace of the late illness, became troublesome, it grew worse, and brought on the dreaded hemorrhage. Through the long night they scarcely imagined it possible for him to live, and when, at length, the dreary daybreak came, every face spoke silently of the same knowledge,—hope was gone.

But vitality is strong at one-and-twenty. There followed six days in which hope sometimes still would try to alternate with the anxiety which was the atmosphere in which the sad watchers behind closed blinds lived, while ever outside fell the soft destructive rain, like a pall over the sad earth. Six lamentable, sleepless nights, followed by six dreary days of

busy inactivity, that seemed as long as years, because no creature in the house found heart to attend to other duties, and there were so few, too few that could be performed in that darkened room, in which the grey shadows on the long white blinds seemed to form crosses and outlines, suggestive of the deeper shadow that hovered there. Chris was always conscious, but speech was almost entirely forbidden him. The language of the dear blue eyes still told the story of the patience, and gratitude, and love which never failed him, even in the hours of his utmost weakness.

On the evening of the sixth day, he seemed to grow stronger. He talked a little, and asked eagerly for Dulcie. Poor girl! the week's trouble had written its weary history in the deep lines round her

eyes, it had faded the colour from her cheeks, and left nothing bright about her but the bands of the abundant hair. Chris's face, hot with feverish colour, his eyes bright and full of life, though so sunken in the hollow cheeks, seemed more animated than the pale anxious one which came to greet him.

‘Chris, my darling.’ Dulcie held the burning, thin hand against her cold cheek, and presently he slipped it on to her shoulder, in the old favourite position, as she bent over him.

‘Dulcie, sweet love—I have been very happy. I am——’ he said, speaking very slowly, and looking into her eyes. ‘But I know it is nearly over.’ Then, resting his hand heavily, and speaking with an effort, he added, ‘Darling, you must never make another’s life miserable, because you

have made mine happy. "Second-best is sometimes best of all," we used to say. I should have been contented with it, from you, if you had had nothing better for me. I shall know, when—when I am away—that you gave me the best, dear. Yet—there will be something left besides—'

'Hush, Chris, hush! I know of nothing but the best. It is *all* yours—all! Oh, my darling, God *will* let you live—He must! Death cannot come to us; we do not know what it is.'

They were silent, then, and Dulcie, with Chris's fingers now clasped round her hand, sat by the bed, and took in every detail of the change that one week had wrought in the dear face. She could hear her watch ticking in the bosom of her dress, and outside a thrush chanted its thinner summer melody, as the day waned

towards its close, and the dull sunset once more reflected itself over the window.

Chris did not reply to her passionate protestations, he had only clasped her fingers in his own by way of answer, and kept the bright clearness of his eyes upon her face, in the silent speech that watchers by a sick-bed know so well.

‘Be good to our poor old major—we misunderstood him,’ Chris asked, presently; and then—‘Would you go down to the drawing-room, and sing to me that thing you used to sing us on Sundays? I could hear if you opened the window—“Tired,” you called it—and come again, by-and-by, to say “Good-night,” dear, when it is finished.’

The clear contralto voice swelled up, presently, into the dimly-lighted sick-room in which Chris lay with a look of

contentment in his tired eyes; and, straining the nerves which were peculiarly alive and sensitive just then, he caught every sound of the singer's sad, sweet melody :

‘Tired, ah ! yes, so tired, dear ;
The day has been very long,
But shadowy gloaming draweth near,
'Tis time for the Evensong.’

Dulcie struggled with the heartrending impulse to give way to tears, struggled to do well this last thing which her love had asked her, and did it excellently. Her voice was clear and true, in spite of the tears :

‘ And now, good-night.’

Let us leave her for a few minutes, as the last notes fade into the dim twilight. This sorrow is too sacred to be intruded upon; in solitude it must have vent, though, by-and-by, she will be brave and

calm when she goes to his room again to say 'Good-night.'

Poor Major Bultitaft, with a weary, distressed face, and Michael are with him now, but their presence makes no difference to her. Dulcie remains, silently holding the hand which has sought hers again, until, through the window, thrown open to help the sick lad's laboured breathing, floats in the sound of eleven, chiming from the stable clock at the Tower House.

'Go to bed for a little while, dear. You look so tired. Major, I will call you, too, to take my place at daybreak. I will come before, if he is worse.'

Chris heard Michael speak, and as Dulcie, obedient from sheer fatigue and trouble, rose to obey him, he made a last strong effort, and put both arms around her.

‘My darling, good-night.’

Dulcie went to her room. She took off her dress, and wrapped a large shawl round her, and threw herself upon the outside of the bed. Excitement and anxiety would not allow her to rest easily, and, while fatigued nature asserted itself, her mind found no repose. She was sensitively alive to every sound around her, though she took no account of how time passed, and her limbs rested heavily. But, gradually, the vivid impressions of the last few hours grew hazy, leaving nothing but the dim sense of unrestful trouble, and she slept uneasily.

In the sick-room, Michael watched through the long silent hours, listening to the painful breathing from the bed, and occasionally administering the prescribed nourishment. He knelt and prayed some-

times, and Chris, watching him, once said, absently, as though his mind had been wandering:

‘I shall never have seen her—my mother—since——’ and then added, as if one thought connected itself with another, “As one whom his mother comforteth.”’

He seemed to sleep presently, and tired Michael, resting his head upon his hand, heard the Tower House clock strike two, as in a dream, and dozed, wakefully, also. Dulcie was still sleeping; troubled tears, which could not spare even her sleep, rested upon her cheek. The intense silence of mid-night was passed, and outside, a little breeze, before the dawn, rustled in the lime branches, and aroused a twitter from sleeping birds. Dulcie opened her eyes and sat up.

It seemed to her that a broad beam of

light was flooding in upon her through the dimness, and that, in the light, a figure stood a moment by her bed. She thought it was her mother, for she had been dreaming of her, and dreams draw but a faint, unrecognised distinction between the living and the dead ; and then she remembered it must be Chris, and put out her hand towards him. A fresh vigour came into the hand as she stretched it out, the fingers tingled, her eyes seemed to open wider. She was conscious. The movement of the hand had awakened her, and the vision faded. The room was in darkness, or at least, in no more than a glimmer of daylight, and she was alone. It had been a waking dream. But she got up hastily, her heart beating fast, and fastened on her dress, and, putting back the tumbled masses of her hair behind her ears, she opened the

door. Why had Michael not been to call her? Though she was but half-awake yet, still the knowledge came to her, there had been another call at dawn that morning,—her awakening was too late.

It was no dread, but a reality, she went forth to meet. If her hand did not tremble nor her heart fail her, as she opened her door, it was that she had never before been face to face with this Reality to understand its magnitude; and because (ah! how those know the feeling, whom Azrael has just visited) the blessed dead, who are but just gone out from our presence, seem at first, to us who remain, such a little, such a very little way off. The full knowledge of our loss does not come all at once to us, we know it better in a year.

Her brother was coming towards her down the corridor. Dulcie did not see

the expression in his face, but she knew what it was that he had to tell. She knew, presently, that his arm was around her, and that her forehead was leaning upon his shoulder, and then, at last, she realised how great was the trouble which Michael's loving arm and tender sympathy were powerless to comfort.

After a time, Michael threw open the passage-window and leaned out, still keeping his arm round her. A roseate flush was struggling with the grey in the east, and the rain had ceased. A few birds fluttered from the creepers round the window, and the rich, heavy odour of drenched roses came in with a cool whiff of morning air.

The Tower clock tolled a half-hour. Neither brother nor sister spoke a word. Dulcie's eyes rested on each familiar object

outside ; she knew that day was dawning, that the birds were singing, and that a fresh scent of damp earth and roses was all around, and yet her mind, consenting to none of these things, was an utter, hopeless blank, looking beyond them, trying to understand her loss, and fathoming nothing.

A great loss stuns sometimes in this way. It compels silence, for it exercises a blunting sense of stupefaction, that can find no outlet in emotion. Tears were to come afterwards in the presence of Death, tears too relieved her, when she witnessed how uncontrolled was the grief of her father, and of the poor old soldier, who came at dawn, too late for a ‘good-bye.’

There can be no profit in dwelling upon such grief—it was borne by each according to the measure of the strength which was

in him ; it left a shadow, not without its memories of golden lining, in the lives of everyone.

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Passing over the sad gathering, in soft summer rain, of mourners round an open grave, our history draws a veil across the annals of Basildene for the four subsequent years which succeeded that dawn of a hopeless day.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER DAY BREAKS.

My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;
That, after Last returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched ;
That what began best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

ROBERT BROWNING.

UNDER the dull, hot skies which lower over
the long strip of the Red Sea, half way
between Suez and Aden, England, under
the changing systems and barterings of
her latter-day politics, hath gotten to her-
self a military station.

Forgotten, or remembered only for abuse, by a government which disapproves of its predecessor's acquisition, S—— and its military occupants have a sorry position bequeathed to them, until such time as the ministry decides whether the new military station is to be abandoned or retained. And in the meanwhile, since the home authorities just now are thinking of bringing in a bill for the restoration of the place to its original owners—when Parliament has once disposed of other troublesome possessions nearer home—it seems superfluous to send out supplies of any sort, beyond the barest necessities, to this awkward little possession, which everyone has grown so heartily sick of hearing about.

They are short of stores, of clothing, and of ammunition at S——; short, too, of officers; and soon Arab sharp-shooters,

typhoid, and sunstroke, will render the station short of men. For, though the gallant company, strong enough once to hold the place, and make a creditable muster under Her British Majesty's flag, has never been reduced by the War Office from the time it was first sent there, these deadly enemies of the desert have been working such fell havoc among its ranks, that the gaunt, home-sick remainder, lessened now by one-third of their original complement, are driven to wonder, 'Does the British public never read its papers, that they forget us so?'

In that far-away station, happily, these men are ignorant of how insignificant and small type a paragraph in the dailies now suffices to furnish friends in England with the items of bad news, which now and again find their way thither from S—. The

chairman of a certain great London hospital, being better posted than his neighbours in particulars respecting life and death in this British possession,—an unprofitable relative having once accepted the Queen's shilling, and been drafted thither,—had acted the good Samaritan's part, and taken pity upon the unfortunate spot, which parliamentary levite and War Office priest thus indifferently passed by.

The long, narrow, white-washed shed, which was honoured by the name of the Military Hospital, and too frequently filled to overflowing with patients, was the brightest spot in all the dull, parched, sandy region; for here the Samaritan chairman had sent two trained English nurses, almost on his own responsibility; and here, at least, such scanty comfort, coolness, and attention as S——'s limited resources

could provide, were to be found at their best.

The two Englishwomen, in their neat grey gowns, white caps and aprons, themselves gave an atmosphere to the building, that was not to be found elsewhere. Men died, with cool hands tending them gently to the end, or grew convalescent, watching the orderly, quiet figures going about their duties in so business-like a way, and felt not utterly forgotten of the world, in their presence. There were ten beds in the narrow white building, an unbeautiful enough place in itself, and fitted up with the least possible expense. At the further end were the nurses' little sitting-room and dormitory: the row of white beds, all against the low wall to your right, as you stood at the entrance door.

A gaunt, holland-coated military orderly acted as the nurses' subordinate, fetching the water, and doing such cooking and cleaning as they required. Tin stable pails, full of water, stood about between the beds, to supply the means of applying the frequent cold bandages, and perhaps also to give off a slight atmosphere of cool moisture into the ward, where neither white-wash nor water availed to reduce the stifling heat in the day-time.

Over one bed there is a rough crucifix, left by some grateful Hibernian occupant who had recovered, and felt his gratitude and duty to fellow-patients demanded the gift; over another is a bright oleograph text, 'Watch and pray,' on a black ground; the owner of this had ended his weary watch, and found a better answer to

his prayer than in that petition, which he had put up so frequently in his delirium, that he might be ordered home to England, when he got well, and his oleograph remains because no one has claimed it, to take it away. Such adornments are worthy of notice, as significant of the whole history of the place, and they are the only æsthetic objects in this bare building, where each article is a necessary too often sadly inadequate.

The day is wearing to its close: the rays of the afternoon sun strike down upon the white roof, and the eight hollow-eyed occupants of the ward lie or sit in such patient endurance of their aches and woes, and of the intense heat as they can muster, looking out with tired eyes at blank walls and buzzing flies.

One imaginative patient, versed in Scrip-

ture, imagines to himself that he can realise now, what the Egyptian plague of flies was like; another, a convalescent, sits by his bed, languidly reading a *Daily News* some two months ancient of date, which has found its way to S——, while, from the nurses' sitting-room, issue the sounds suggestive of tea-time, and a low murmur of educated English-women's voices.

To this scene, enters the gaunt orderly, a little folded missive in his hand, which he takes to the nurses' room and presents, looking (he is not aware of it, but the gaunt orderly is so weary and parched with his day's duties in the everlasting sand) a trifle longingly at the tea in nurse's little tea-cups.

'A case of sunstroke just come in from the interior. A civil case. Colonel Ward-roper wants to know if we can take it in

here, or whether one of us will come to the barracks. There is the spare bed Eardley left yesterday, the case can come there. We can't either of us leave, while Lane wants so much looking after. Will you have a cup of tea, Jones, while I write the answer to the colonel?'

Nurse has been trained to use her eyes, and she has not over-looked the wistful glance in the messenger's face. She pours the last drop out from her little black teapot, and gives it him before writing her reply to Colonel Wardroper; and then, her companion meanwhile going to arrange for the reception of the new case, she writes, with the little pencil of her *châtelaine*, a few words on the fly-leaf of the note. The sunstroke case can be received at once.

There is a little action which nurse has,

that may recall old remembrances to us. As she despatches the orderly, and comes to her companion's assistance in the arrangement of mattresses and blankets, she mechanically puts back behind her ears some stray bright waves of loose hair, that have wandered out from the white cap.

Nurses at S—— are so accustomed to cases of sunstroke, they have absolutely nothing to remark upon the reception of the present one; it is even less interesting than usual, being a civil case, and not one of their own poor men. Their preparations, thus, are carried on quite silently; the heat may have something to answer for on the subject, as well as their lack of interest.

Tramping feet are heard presently, and the civil case is brought into the ward.

It is a gentleman, a young fellow, hardly more than a boy ; the hot flush of the sun-stroke has crept up under a fair sunburnt English skin, and it is silvery flaxen hair which lies in damp, matted curls upon the burning head. Rather an interesting case, after all ; probably a very sad one, for the lad is unconscious, and evidently seriously ill. His companion, the tall man in the tweed Norfolk suit, who takes off his pith helmet as he enters the ward, looks grave and troubled ; he evidently fears the worst. Nurses at such times have small need to look about them, all their attention is required for the case ; and the stranger, too, is so much occupied with his own thoughts, he does not regard the nurses as anything but necessary parts of the machinery of this dreary place. His notice is first attracted by seeing the flash of a diamond,

an incongruous object in such surroundings, and he sees that it is on a slim white hand, which has dipped its fingers critically into the stable pail near by, as if to test the coolness of the water that is in it.

The fingers are shaken deprecatingly, as they are raised from their tepid immersion, and a voice, that sounds like an echo out of the past, says,

‘Jones, this water is quite hot, we must have some more at once, for the bandages.’

‘Dulcie! Miss Carwinion, is it you? You here?’ the hospital walls again resounding to a low, deep voice that we have heard before.

‘Mr. Scudamore! Oh, this is strange! I am glad to see the face of an old friend again! Was it you came in with this

sunstroke case? and I was so wondering. Who is he, Mr. Scudamore? Who is this?’

‘The likeness strikes you too?’ asked Scudamore, looking sadly at the patient, and yet realising suddenly that the fatigue and depression, which had been weighing him down oppressively when he entered the ward, were mysteriously vanishing. He was so surprised and rejoiced over this encounter, he forgot to be even puzzled at its taking place in so out-of-the-way a locality.

‘The poor fellow’s name is Conyers. Joy Conyers we called him. Does the likeness strike you too? I saw it the first day I met him; yet I do not know if there is any connection.’

Jones at this moment came back with

the pail of fresh water, and Dulcie had duties to perform.

‘May I come in presently, and see how he goes on?’ asked Scudamore, noticing that the doctor and the other nurse were needing her services.

‘Oh, yes, do! We shall know better what to think about him by-and-by;’ and, the doctor retiring with him, to learn some details of the patient’s seizure, Dulcie and her fellow-nurse were left alone with the case.

Alas! too little could be done for all cases of sunstroke at S——. Ice, there was none; the very water grew tepid as it emerged from the well into the ward, and the hot, stifling atmosphere left much to be desired in the treatment of these patients.

As Dulcie stooped over the young man's burning head, and passed her slim fingers, which always seemed the coolest things in the hospital, among the damp fair curls, a flood of sacred memories, half-sad and half-radiant, rushed into her mind. Another young form she had watched die, too, had been so like to this. She was older now; the grave, mature ways of the quiet nurse, even to herself, seemed incongruous with the full young boyhood; and yet, once—four years ago,—she had been so little conscious of the difference. Would she have grown older, as she had, while the boy she loved changed so little, till a wide gulf, such as she saw now, grew up between them? Ah, God! Had she been mercifully spared inflicting a life-long cruelty, after all?

‘This hair must come off, nurse,’ she said, still keeping her cool fingers upon the curls, and speaking only to divert the thoughts which it was better not to think at such a time. The typhoid case, Lane, presently grew restless, and required the other nurse’s attention; thus Dulcie was left to take charge of the new patient, and was standing by him, wringing out wet bandages, when Arthur Scudamore returned in the evening.

Scudamore found a chair, and brought it by his friend’s bed, he sat watching the flushed, unconscious face, and sometimes talked in a low voice to Dulcie. Gradually the oppressive heat of night succeeded the glare of day, and then, Nurse Davis retiring, left these two in charge of the ward.

‘You don’t wish me to leave him, do you?’ Scudamore had asked then, anxiously, his hand upon the pulse of the restless boy on the bed. ‘I think he cannot live through the night, and I’ve got tremendously attached to the poor fellow. I’d like to be with him to the end.’

‘Oh, no! Stay. Do not think of going. He may recognise you, by-and-by. It is hard to die among strangers, and I’m afraid he has no chance.’

As they watched together through the night, Scudamore told her, disconnectedly, the story of his friendship with Joy Conyers.

‘I got tired of only painting,’ he said, ‘success did not seem to be the best thing in life, after all, and when my mother died—you know she died the second year you

were training at St. Nathaniel's—I accepted an offer from the Italian government, to go to Massowah, and on to Abyssinia with Martelli. My being half-Italian, yet altogether English, made me useful, and, the second time Crispi wanted a similar mission done, I got the appointment alone. It was then I made Conyers' acquaintance. Met him at Cairo, on the way out; he was loafing about, doing no good there, and I persuaded him to join me as a volunteer. He was a bright, happy-go-lucky boy, the very life of our party, but we managed badly coming home. Our Arabs mutinied, they wanted to go back to Shoa, and we lost our bearings through it, and got too far east. We had a dreary, anxious time of it; and yesterday, just as our troubles seemed over, and we sighted

S—— here, Conyers broke down suddenly, in the heat. I can't tell how we got him in. He never recovered consciousness after the time he fell, and the Arabs who were with us, fearing we should visit the sins of their brethren upon them, tried to make off, and leave Conyers and me to our fate. I only kept them up to bringing him on here, by walking with my revolver in their direction. It was the most evil four-and-twenty hours it ever was my luck to experience.'—'He seemed a sort of sacred trust,' Arthur said, by and by, looking at the outline of his companion's face, in the dim light, as they stood together for a few moments in the open doorway, with the clear, star-spangled heaven stretching away illimitably above them. 'It seemed a sort of sacred charge, to do the best I

could for him ; perhaps he has a father or mothersomewhere, who are wondering where their truant is,—and—’ Arthur lowered his voice, and still looked steadily at her. ‘ You see it too—he is so like—I wasn’t always quite fair to the other poor fellow, and I thought of you, Dulcie. Strange enough, you were my first thought, when we got him to Wardroper’s. I never imagined such a thing as your being here, at S——, to help us. The coincidences are so strange, I felt impelled to tell you, what otherwise I should have spoken of to no living soul.’

Dulcie clasped her hands together, and over her face there stole a look of gentle gratitude. She looked like some bright ministering spirit as she stood there, with the dim light behind her, in her

sombre uniform and white bands, with the splendid masses of her hair put back smoothly from her face. She raised her eyes to her companion, and felt a strange weakness and inability when she tried to speak.

‘I am not ungrateful. It is generous of you. You have always been so noble, while I—I have never thanked you in return.’

The words came haltingly. She had not expressed in the least all that was in her mind to say. They stood and watched the sentinel, a black shadow in the blue-grey darkness, pace backwards and forwards a few yards higher up to the right of them, a ray of light falling on his bayonet from the stars; and heard from the distant desert the shrill cry of the jackals, or their Arab imitators.

‘Won’t you tell me of yourself; how you came to be here?’ asked Scudamore, by-and-by. ‘I have heard no news of anyone for more than twelvemonths now. When I left England, you were still at the hospital in town.’

‘Very few people know that I am not there still. I kept my coming out here a secret, I was so afraid of breaking down. I only told one or two, besides Mabel and Michael, till I knew if I could stand it. I shall be able to now, there is no fear; for my year’s probation is up in two months’ time, when I may go back to coolness and to England, if I like. But it is pitiful leaving the poor things here; so few who come can stand the climate, and be of any use. I have found some merit in being strong, at last. You know, of course, that Mabel

and Michael are married, and Michael is back at his beloved Oxford work: Poor Basildene! He couldn't have been expected to stay there, but it is sad to think of the village now. Nothing is left there for us but tombstones and memories since father died. Father only lived three months after Chris. Poor father! death just broke his heart. He could never reconcile himself to them; and when he went, and Mabel and Michael had each other and the lectures, the best place for me seemed the hospital, with its little corner, where I could be useful.'

'And you fitted into the corner, and are very useful in it,' said Arthur, quietly, smiling down upon her in his satisfaction, that this corner of hers should so fortunately have chanced to

be traversed once more by his own path in life.

‘Yes,’ said Dulcie, with a long sigh, ‘sometimes—I hope so.’

‘Alas, for poor Basildene!’ Arthur said. ‘It was Basildene no longer when I was there two years ago. How I shall ever muster courage to go back there, I don’t know. Last time I did nothing but luxuriate in Mrs. Purcell’s society. Her chatter seemed like a connecting link with the past, and now I’m afraid I’ve grown to dread even her reminiscences. But I *am* on my way back there. Life has so far been a failure that I mean, at last, to make the attempt to do my duty by Basildene. It is too sad to think of the place now. Its desolation is going, in the end, to drive me to my post there—a grey-haired man,

having tried everything, and found even success a failure.'

He leaned against the door-post, and pushed his fingers through the dark hair almost fiercely. Though he had been speaking in a mocking tone for the last minute or two, he had in reality been desperately in earnest. Dulcie put her hand upon the latch of the door, and drew it together softly. She had no wish to hear him talk like this, and she stole back to the bedside of her patient, Scudamore waiting for a few minutes before he followed her.

Conyers was lying in a heavy, stupefied sleep, the deep colour still suffusing his face. Scudamore came to his side and put his hand upon the restless clenched fist lying above the boy's head on the pillow,

and moved it gently. They had little opportunity again for conversation, for long periods of quiet, even at night, were not to be enjoyed in the little hospital, and one by one, after the short night's sleep of illness, the patients awoke or proved restless, and needed attention. Arthur, left to himself by Conyers' bedside, watched the slim grey figure stealing from patient to patient, in the dim light, and saw, with a certain anticipated satisfaction, how quiet and reassuring her manner was, and how her touch calmed the restless and the suffering.

There was little to be done for poor Conyers; the constantly replaced bandages seemed to be sadly useless in cooling the burning forehead. Still Scudamore watched and carried out Dulcie's few instructions,

doing all like one in a dream, so wonderful it seemed to the weary traveller, worn out with two days and a night of anxious battle with the elements of the desert, to be now at rest, and able to shunt responsibility and future anxiety, in this unexpected presence of the being dearest to him on earth.

After she had come back into the ward, and terminated their conversation, Dulcie found no time for thought that night ; her patients were restless, and her hands were full. It was a time typical of the new order of things which had superseded the old in her life. Hers was now an existence filled with activity, which admitted of few opportunities for meditation. Yet she dimly realised, as she moved to and fro upon her duties, with Scudamore's form

bending over the dying lad continually before her eyes, that she had hitherto not quite understood nor appreciated this man's character. A strong man's gentleness, and tenderness with infirmity, are traits which appeal irresistibly to a woman's nature. It called up a strange medley of feeling in her, the sight of this strength and gentleness combining to tend lovingly the last moments of a friend. The restless head upon the pillow, too, recalled memories of another death-bed, of another fair-haired boy, whose life had ended similarly to this. She was aware, too, that Arthur Scudamore was doing all in spite of the mortal weariness which was at last telling its own tale in his countenance, and that, in a way, as much as for the last proof of his friendship, he was being good to Conyers for the

sake of a restitution he believed that he owed to some one else.

Towards morning the dull coma in which Conyers had lain seemed to be changing for vitality. He opened his eyes, and said, looking round absently, as if to collect his confused ideas : ‘ Scudamore, old fellow !’ and made an effort to turn upon the narrow bed.

Scudamore rose as Conyers spoke to him, and was leaning over him to reply, when Dulcie came to his side. She was too well acquainted with such symptoms, to be misled into false hope by them ; rather she felt she must prepare Scudamore for the worst. As a matter of fact, the movement was fatal to young Conyers’ infinitesimally slender chance of life. A fresh rush of blood to the fevered brain, sent a spasm of

pain across his face, before his friend had answered his greeting, and the look of recognition faded, while spasm after spasm succeeded one another in painful rapidity. There was a wet bandage in her hand, but something stayed Dulcie in her intention of placing it upon his forehead, for a calm came over the convulsed frame, and a deep look of rest once more into the feverish face. Then followed a little trembling sigh.

They both stood one moment, holding their breath, and reluctantly recognising in what presence it was they thus stood, listening almost for the sound of angels' wings. The great silence of night over the desert lay without, the deep silence of sleep and of death lay within, and only the two watchers, standing side by side in

the awful Presence, felt the intense solemnity and calm of that sad moment. It stole as a beam of daylight into the darkness of hearts, emptied of the first brightness of youth, it came, a communion of sorrow, to replace the joy that had communion no longer but with the dead. The fellowship which there is in mutual loss does not come second to the fellowship that is in mutual joy; joy has its communion-service of song, while sorrow holds its truest rites in most sacred silence.

Arthur Scudamore and Dulcie spoke no word to one another, as they stood together in the presence of death, but it was as though scales fell from their eyes, and for the first time they were fully capable of realising the measure of the stature of each other's suffering and patience, and of

knowing through what great trouble they each had had need to come, before they could stand thus, side by side, and interpret what it was that was in their hearts.

Death breaks down barriers which seemed as mountains; we perceive the infinite littleness of life through its medium, while it makes the ways and the ends of life clearer by revealing to us results. What is life that we should spoil it by misunderstanding, and concealing that which is best in one another? Life is so little a thing, death finishes all so soon.

Faint daylight presently sent its first rays straggling into the white ward, and Scudamore, looking up from the long train of thoughts which had kept him silent, turned to his companion. It seemed

to him that he understood all which had been in her mind, too.

‘See, it is daybreak, and it is hot in here. Will you come to the door and watch the sun rise, before we call the others?’

Dulcie looked up, and silently assented, and they went together to the little wooden portico, looking out towards the distant sea.

It was the coolest hour of the day at S——; a little air stirred, and moved the dejected Union Jack over the government buildings, and with it a broad flush stole into the eastern sky. Scudamore felt speech almost impossible; the rush of cool air, after his fatigue and the wearying heat of the ward, brought him no capacity but one for silent enjoyment, while Dulcie,

also, was satisfied to watch the dawn and feel at rest in the coolness.

She was straining her eyes, and looking away over the broad, white sheet of motionless water, not knowing that they were full of tears, when Scudamore laid his hand on hers. The touch was gentle, reverential, but it was a firm, strong clasp.

‘Dulcie.’ His heart spoke with his lips. There was a question, the future of two lives involved in the sound of her name, and Dulcie did not draw her hand away. ‘Dulcie, is there only one dawn in life, only one blessing?’ he asked, looking into her eyes, an appeal unspoken in every weary trace of trouble and fatigue upon his face. ‘I have loved you so long, Dulcie. I would be content with so little in return.’

A day ago, if this appeal had come

to her, it would have awakened no feeling but revulsion; the very thought of listening to it, would have seemed to her like a betrayal of the most sacred memories of the past. But now, fresh from the presence of a face that had vividly recalled those memories, and fresh, too, from the long silence which death had lain as a spell over the living, she could see differently, and had learned to understand the lesson that had once before been repeated to deaf ears.

‘Second best is sometimes best of all.’

And so it was, that as the red of sunrise deepened, she let her hand rest in that of Arthur Scudamore, and mustered courage to return his gaze, looking at him and understanding most perfectly his nobility, through her tears.

‘It is “second-best” that you have won, Arthur. All that is left. I know it is too little in return for all your great love and patience, but——’

‘God knows it is enough, my darling! Give me what you can, and let me earn more. Only say you love me a little, say it, and I am satisfied.’

‘I do. You have made me love you. Oh, Arthur, you have been too good and patient with me! There is no one in the world like you.’

He put his arm around her, and drew the tearful face towards his own, almost timidly, as if hardly venturing to realise to himself this fulfilment of his long-lost hope. He kissed her upon the forehead, reverentially, putting his hand upon the bright hair of this Hope of his, as if she had been

his patron-saint, and this the aureole of her sanctity; and then their lips met in the more human confession of love.

They stood together for some minutes, watching the daylight broadening over the sky, Arthur's arm resting where he had placed it, as he drew her towards him. At last the broad sun broke from under the horizon of water, and daylight grew clear upon the land. Then Dulcie broke the spell of silent happiness; she remembered her duties in the hospital.

'I mustn't stay. They will be wondering where I am,' she said, slipping a hand into Arthur's before she left him.

'God bless you, Dulcie! It is the beginning of a new life, this,' he said, pressing the hand, and meeting her eyes with a look of intense gratitude.

And, when she left him, he still paced up and down outside the hospital, for a little while, meditating upon the new-found happiness, and on the loss which, in a way, had revealed it to him.

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There is a little cemetery, with rows of tiny, wooden crosses, and long rows of nameless graves, at S——, and here it was that, in the evening, they laid, with a sort of military ceremony, all that was mortal of poor young Conyers.

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For two days more, Arthur Scudamore remained at S——, the guest of Colonel Wardroper, (he has never been able to understand, why people think this station such a dreary, God-forsaken spot ; so well

he rested here, after his desert wanderings !) then he went back to Massowah, to deliver up his papers, before taking passage for England in a passing steamer.

And now the remainder of our story is briefly told.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTERMATH.

Ah, take the imperfect gift I bring,
 Knowing the primrose yet is dear,
 The primrose of the later year,
 As not unlike to that of Spring.

In Memoriam.

THERE has been a quiet wedding in a quiet church in Oxford, at which the chance spectator has seen very little to interest her. To-day, that ubiquitous person, to whom we feel compelled, in this case, to accord a feminine pronoun, has seen a bridegroom, tall and

handsome, but grave of face, and with a sprinkling of grey powdered over his black hair, and with lines of care around his mouth, which the present deep happiness of his position is well-nigh effacing, and a bride, too, who can hardly be called in her first girlhood, but whose calm face and radiant eyes show that she has learned the secret of quiet happiness, by the experiences of life. Our spectator, perhaps, might notice, that the young clergyman who has performed the ceremony, and who comes and stands afterwards, looking animated and pleased, by the side of his sweet-faced young wife, is singularly like the bride.

We recognise him as Michael Carwinion, the successful lecturer of Tudor College, whose reputation is extending beyond the limits of his university ; a man whose in-

fluence for truth and good is more valued, almost, than his learning. It is harder to recognise in the tall fair-bearded fellow, who has given the bride away, our old slight acquaintance, Francis, for tropical climates and the sea have bronzed him out of all knowledge.

The ceremony is over now, and our chance spectator moves hurriedly away, feeling scornful over the insignificance of its details. The very house in Merton Street, whence the bridal-party drove to church, and later on to the railway station, has been so little disturbed by the day's proceedings, that, by four o'clock in the afternoon, all is as quiet there as if nothing had happened. The babies are romping upstairs with Uncle Francis, quite forgetful of the fact, that they had once felt the

day like Sunday, from having been taken to church. Only Michael, kissing his sweet wife, as he sits by her little tea-table, waiting for Francis to finish his romp in the nursery overhead, before claiming his cup of tea, holds the gentle face for a moment between his hands, and says, looking into the trustful eye,

‘ Oh ! how thankful I am for this day, Mabel ! God grant it may be the beginning of as much happiness for Dulcie and Arthur, as a day like it was for us ! ’

A train is speeding away westward beyond Reading, through August harvest-fields and sunshine, and presently, from the church-tower at Basildene, there breaks through the summer evening air a peal and clash of welcoming bells, and the

shouts and cheers of tenants welcoming back their squire; friends, too, greeting a friend in his bride. There are triumphal arches and mottoes, and by-and-by, as the carriage which contains the squire and his wife nears the village, a halt is called in their progress, and the tall, brown horses are unfastened. Then willing Westernshire human muscles discharge their duty for them, through the street, and up the avenue to the Tower House, amid increased acclamation and hurrahing.

It is a cheerful evening for Basildene, with good promise for the future, but the persons who are principally concerned in the rejoicings are conscious of a deep undercurrent of feeling, as they return together to these well-known scenes. There is an association connected with every re-

membered face and spot which are passed upon the road ; memories of youth, and of life that once seemed to have another aspect than this fulfilment, but that serve only now to link together, in a closer bond of sympathy, these two who have suffered so deeply before this aftermath of quiet happiness has been accorded them.

When the brawny country arms relax their lugging at the shafts, before his own doorstep, Scudamore stands for a minute by his wife, bareheaded under the portico, and says a few words of thanks and greeting to the people. He makes a brief confession of past neglect, and a promise, capable of fulfilment only with his wife's assistance, he declares, of better things in future ; to which the tenants respond with cheers, still making reservations in their

own small minds, however, concerning 't squire,' who keeps up his reputation among them for being the most unfathomable of characters, by looking so serious and solemn upon his wedding-day.

There is a little dinner laid, with much consideration as to the fitness of things, and the due display of family plate, on the table in Arthur's study. Parkes, the butler, who has grown old in the service of two masters at the Tower House, has needed no more than his own *esprit de corps* to make these arrangements as perfect as he knows how. The old servant rejoices to see this day in his young master's life, as much as if he had, himself, been a member of the family.

Scudamore, awaiting his wife, stands talking to Parkes in the study; the good

old man is beaming at the sound of his master's praises, but when Dulcie arrives, clad in her simple white, and speaks, too, to the old servant, Parkes, replying, does not wait for the initiative from his master. He slips away with an excuse; if Mr. Arthur wants him, there is always the bell.

The big, blue china bowl in the fireplace has been filled by Parkes with sunflowers; he knew his master's taste so well, he could scorn the suggestion of a parlour-maid, who wanted roses put there, as more appropriate for the occasion.

Arthur had been admiring the sunflowers, when Dulcie entered, but as Parkes retired, and closed the door, he came and put his arm round the slim white figure.

‘Welcome home, my wife,’ he said, kissing her, and then added: ‘Dulcie, this is

a blessed home-coming ! To have you here, my own ! Here, where the memory of my lost Hope has always haunted me !’

‘ I shall love this room the best in all the house, Arthur,’ says Dulcie, clasping her fingers over his black coat-sleeve, while he still holds his arm around her. ‘ Hope shall not haunt you now, but reality. I shall make you share this snugger with me, and let me bring my books and easels, and mix them up with yours.’

‘ “ What is mine is thine,” dear one, to work your sweet will upon,’ he answers, leading her to her seat in front of the carved fireplace. ‘ I shall have to make a fresh painting of you, in your new surroundings, Dulcie. That white frock of yours and the white ribbons are so wonderfully pretty. How do you think of

such things? We mustn't call the new picture Reality, though, for my lady looks too much like a fairy for such a title.'

'A benevolent old fairy then, Arthur. You forget what a very ancient personage I am,' she answers, smiling over her shoulder at her husband.

'Never old to me, darling; not when the golden halo has changed to white,' he says, putting his hand on to the tempting coils of bright hair, as he passes behind her chair to his place at the table.

While they are at dinner, these two find a host of things to talk of which the pressure of events, since their meeting in Oxford three days ago, has crowded out until now.

'I have not had this room changed at all,' Arthur tells her. 'When the work-

men were papering and painting elsewhere, I told them to leave everything here untouched. If there is anything that you like altered, you will tell me yourself. It is all sacred here to your old self, and only the new Dulcie, my wife, is to make any changes.'

'I shall only restore what you have changed. I just miss a big easel with a red curtain over it. Everything else is quite perfect. Mayn't the easel come back, Arthur? Or——'

Scudamore hesitated a moment, and then rose and unlocked the old chest, and leaned over into it, reaching the canvas that had long been buried in its depths.

'If you wish it, darling. I am afraid it hasn't improved much by lying face down-

wards in that old box, and the fulfilment is so much better than this "Hope."

He put it on an easel facing her, and looked from the picture to the changed face of the original.

'I think I must have a very clever husband,' said Dulcie, gravely, feeling incapable of saying anything wiser than this trite remark, with the flood of memories, which the picture recalled, rushing through her mind. "Hope" shall live on the easel, behind its red curtain, to remind me always what my husband's love is,' she said. 'That is the only restoration I shall ever want to make in your study, Arthur.'

'Did I tell you, Dulcie, that old Major Bultitaft is living in the village? He has taken a little house near here, and, when I was down a month ago, we commenced

what I hope will be a lasting friendship. I have asked him to come to see us to-morrow. Poor old man! his life seems such a lonely one since he gave up the army, and lost the hope he had made himself for his old age, at the same time. He told me a great deal that I never knew before. That Sir Eustace Kitson came to England, and made all arrangements. But you have heard all this. What I wanted to tell you is, that it seems a Mr. Jocelyn Conyers, a cousin of Colonel Jocelyn's, inherited all poor Chris's property. Major Bultitaft knew nothing of this Jocelyn Conyers, beyond that Colonel Jocelyn and he had never been friends, and that Conyers had a son, who had given him a great deal of trouble, after being expelled from school. I feel sure now that poor Joy

Conyers, who died at S——, must have been his son, but that he never knew anything of the cousin whom he resembled so wonderfully. I was sure you would like to know that it was no chance likeness we saw. It draws our little world closer together, still, dear, doesn't it? It seemed like another link in the chain that is completed to-day, Dulcie, when I heard this.'

There was a faltering round the corners of her mouth when she answered :

'Oh, Arthur! I think if we saw at the beginning all the strange windings which are to lead us to the light at last, we should never have the courage to live at all. It all seems too strange to be true, in our lives,' she added, raising her eyes to his, and smiling in spite of sad thoughts,

for so much courage and strong love were written in the quiet eyes that smiled back at her.

When the dinner was ended, which had proved more a matter of talking than eating,—the noisy church-bells having ceased their acclamations, and the sun being now near its final disappearance behind the southern blue of the chalk hills,—Arthur stood by his wife's side at the study window.

‘Shall we go outside? Would you like it, or would you rather renew old acquaintance in the daylight?’ he asked, holding back the red curtain for her, as though he anticipated her answer.

‘It is so glorious, let us go now!’ and she put her hand inside his arm.

They walked across the lawn and stood by the little artificial pool, where white water-

lilies grew, and here Arthur leaned across, and pulled two or three of the dripping long-stemmed blossoms for her.

‘Our first night at Basildene, and I believe it is the most beautiful we have had the whole of the summer. The birds are all singing their noisiest in your honour, now the bells have stopped. Shall we take the lilies to the churchyard?’ he asked, knowing that this was a suggestion that even his wife’s perfect confidence in him might have shrunk from proposing.

She gave him a grateful look as a reply, and, holding the wet long stalks in one hand, nestled the other arm again within his own, and they walked silently forward for a minute or two. The vicarage, in its summer bower of creepers, came in view, and the memories which the sight recalled

prompted Scudamore to clasp tightly the hand which trembled a little as it rested on his arm. He put his arm right round her, as they stood before the two fresh tombstones, that are within the long evening shadow of the vicarage-house.

JOHN MICHAEL CARWINION,
Thirty years Vicar of Basildene,
Entered into rest
September 24th, 188—,

is on the stone before which they pause first. At the other, Arthur, speaking very gently, says :

‘Darling, I know this is your holiest of holies. First of all. I want you never to think that the thought pains me. My “second best” is too perfect for that; and I wished above everything to come here, and tell you so to-night.’

CHRISTOPHER JOCELYN

Died July 188—,

Aged 21 years,

Isaiah xl, 30—31,

is all that is inscribed on this other, before which they stand silent for a little while after Arthur's last words. The evening sun slants through the trees, and makes bright the whole church-yard, only leaving this one spot in quiet shade.

Presently Dulcie kneels, and lays the water-lilies reverently on the long green mound, and touches the head-stone with her hand. Then she rises, with tears brimming up into her eyes, and, taking her husband's hand, she lifts it to her lips.

‘Chris was, and he always must be, first. There never was another who could take

the place of a first love ; but, Arthur, sometimes there is a thing which is better even than that—the thing I have found to-day, dear,—the perfect trust of the best and noblest man I ever knew.’

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